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## ÚVODNÍ SLOVO

Milí čtenáři,

vrcholící práce na nové muzejní definici mají svůj počátek de facto v roce 1946, kdy byla založena Mezinárodní Rada muzeí, ICOM. První definice vznikla na základě práce zastupitelů čtrnácti států (včetně tehdejšího Československa). V následujících 76 letech též v rámci ICOM docházelo k mezinárodní spolupráci. V národních kontextech se podoby výkladu pojmu odlišovaly a též dobově proměňovaly – např. právě český zákon o muzeích a galeriích z roku 1959 (který byl zrušen a nahrazen v roce 2000) zdůrazňoval významné politické úkoly, související s tehdejšími zaměřením státu.

Odlišnost ve vymezování muzejního pojmosloví v jednotlivých státech směřovalo v následujících letech přesto k hledání shodných závěrů. ICOM dosáhl v této oblasti několika úspěchů. V roce 1974 se podařilo po složitých diskuzích schválit definici muzea, která je do těchto dnů platná. Během let došlo k několika drobnějším úpravám. Výraznějším zásahem pak bylo především doplnění nové definice o nehmotné kulturní dědictví v roce 2007.

V roce 2016 byla na generální konferenci ICOM v Miláně diskuze o potřebě nové definice v souvislosti s proměnou nahlížení na některé pojmy, případně jejich vzniku (např. globalizace, inkluze, demokratizace, well-being ad.) obnovena. Tzv. Kyotská definice však nebyla v roce 2019 přijata, mj. z důvodu politických konotací a nedostatečné spolupráci, která by brala v potaz náhledy „státních“ definic jednotlivých skupin, pracujících v rámci ICOM.

V posledním mezikonferenčním období (2019–2022) byla založena pracovní skupina ICOM Define, která si ve své práci vytkla právě vytvoření nové definice pojmu „muzeum“. Činnost probíhala především v rozsáhlé virtuální komunikaci, výměně mnoha názorů národních komitétů, zástupců univerzit, přičleněných organizací i jednotlivců.

Museologica Brunensia přináší právě přehled několika přístupů, které byly v rámci spolupráce s ICOM Define zvoleny. Dosažené výsledky – např. v představené práci české pracovní komise – ukazují, že k rozdílným chápáním dochází i uvnitř muzejních obcí jednotlivých států. Výzkum tak logicky ústí v procentuální vyjadřování pojmů, znaků, které jsou představeny ve vystavované definici. Ve vyšší úrovni (mezinárodní) řeší obdobným způsobem otázku i ICOM Define.

Může být však výsledkem této práce získání průměrů využívaných pojmů a ty nejčastější umístit „povinně“ do muzejní definice? Nemohou se některá častěji užívaná slova v této škále objevovat výše pouze kvůli tradičnímu pojetí bez ohledu na možné změny v muzejním světě? Nesetkáme se nakonec se stručnějším a upraveným „Kyotem 2019“? Nebo se budeme co nejpevněji držet „Vídne 2007“?

Václav Rutar, předseda Muzeologické komise  
Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky

Zvláštní poděkování za vydání tohoto čísla patří  
Mgr. Monice Mikuláškové z Muzea Brněnska.

Redakce

## EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

the culminate work on a new museum definition de facto began in 1946, when the International Council of Museums, ICOM, was founded. The first definition was created as a result of the work of representatives of fourteen states (including the then Czechoslovakia). In the following 76 years, ICOM became an umbrella for international cooperation in the field. The forms of interpretation of the term were different in individual national contexts, and they have changed over time – for example, the Czech Act on Museums and Galleries from 1959 (which was repealed and replaced in 2000) emphasized important political tasks related to the focus and preferences of the state at that time.

Nevertheless, the differences in the definition of museum terminology in individual states led to the search for common conclusions in the following years. ICOM has achieved several successes in this area. In 1974, after complex discussions, it was possible to approve a museum definition which is valid to this day. Over the years, several minor modifications were made. A more significant intervention was mainly the addition of intangible cultural heritage to the new definition in 2007.

The discussion about the need for a new definition, reflecting the change in the perception of some terms or their origin (e.g. globalisation, inclusion, democratisation, well-being, etc.), was renewed at the ICOM General Conference in Milan in 2016. However, the so-called Kyoto definition was not accepted in 2019, among other reasons due to political connotations and insufficient cooperation that would take into account the perspectives of the “state” definitions of individual groups working within ICOM.

In the last inter-conference period (2019–2022), the ICOM Define working group was established, whose goal is to create a new definition of the term “museum”.

The activity primarily consisted in extensive virtual communication, the exchange of many opinions of national committees, representatives of universities, affiliated organizations and individuals.

Museologica Brunensia presents an overview of several approaches that were chosen within the collaboration with ICOM Define. The results achieved – for example, in the presented work of the Czech working commission – show that different conceptions also occur within the museum communities of individual states. The research thus logically results in the percentage expression of terms and features that are implemented in the presented definition. At a higher level (international), ICOM Define solves the question in a similar way.

However, can the result of this work be to obtain the averages of the terms used and place the most frequent ones “obligatorily” in the museum definition? Could not some of the more commonly used words appear higher in this scale just because of the traditional concept, regardless of possible changes in the museum world? Will not we end up with a more concise and modified “Kyoto 2019”? Or will we hold on as tightly as possible to “Vienna 2007”?

Václav Rutar, Chairman of the Museological Committee of the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries

Special thanks for publishing this issue go to Mgr. Monika Mikulášková from the Museum of the Brno Region.

Editorial office

## STUDIE/ARTICLES

## THE METAMUSEUM AS THE FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM INSTITUTION?

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FERNANDO ECHARRI

## ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

Throughout its history, the museum has undergone a great evolution in the sense that it has shifted its weight from the column of objects to the column of people. Today, museums face many challenges in an increasingly fast-paced and changing society, where the personal, the social, diversity and inclusion are advancing forcefully. Taking into account the necessary adaptation of the museum to social requirements, this article analyzes the situation of the museum institution with foresight for the future to conceptualize the so-called metamuseum, capable of reflecting with itself in real time and with characteristics such as resilience, interdisciplinarity, adaptation, openness, independence and delocalization. This article proposes the metamuseum as a fifth generation of museums, where the interaction with objects is transformed into a successful experience where the needs and expectations of individuals and social groups are fully satisfied.

**Metamuseum jako budoucnost muzejní instituce?**

V průběhu své historie prošla muzea velkým vývojem, během něhož se ohnisko zájmu postupně přesunulo ze sbírkových předmětů na návštěvníky. Muzea dnes čelí mnoha výzvám ve stále rychleji se rozvíjející a měnící společnosti se silným důrazem na individuální i celospolečenské potřeby, rozmanitost a inkluzi.

S přihlédnutím k nezbytnému přizpůsobení muzea společenským požadavkům tento článek analyzuje současný stav muzejních institucí, nastiňuje výhled do budoucna a představuje koncept tzv. metamuzea, které je schopné reflektovat sebe sama v reálném čase a disponuje vlastnostmi jako je pružnost, interdisciplinarita, přizpůsobivost, otevřenost, nezávislost a delokalizace. Článek prezentuje metamuseum jako pátou generaci muzeí, kde se interakce s předměty transformuje v úspěšnou zkušenost, která plně uspokojuje potřeby a očekávání jednotlivců i sociálních skupin.

## KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

*museology – metamuseum – inclusion – resiliency – future museologie – metamuseum – inkluze – pružnost – budoucnost*

## Introduction

What will be the upcoming of the museum in the future? What will be the conceptualization of the museum of the future or, perhaps it would be better to say, the future of museums? Since the beginning of museology, with the so-called “Cabinets of Wonders”, described in Babylon in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.),<sup>1</sup> passing through the “Mouseion”, located in Alexandria (200 B.C.), considered the first

museum in history,<sup>2</sup> there have been many changes in the museum institution. These changes have possibly responded to the parallel development of societies, trying to respond to their changing demands. But perhaps there is always the feeling that museums “*are not capable of solving the problems of defining their role in society*”,<sup>3</sup> sometimes showing true identity crises. In a certain way, there is a feeling that museums always lag behind what society demands, and the fear that they will once again become warehouses of old, unused and inaccessible objects does not disappear.<sup>4</sup>

The museum of the future must walk hand in hand with society, it must solve these problems of defining its role in society. For this reason, one way of thinking about the museums of the future is to start from the definition of a museum, to situate this definition as the nuclear foundation on which to base museum conceptualization. The first thing to say if we want to start from the definition of museum is that there are multiple possible definitions. Which one to choose as a starting point? The current

<sup>2</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. *Manual de Museología*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> CAMERON, Duncan F. El museo: un templo o un forum. 1971. In DESVALLÉES, André, Marie-Odile DE BARRY and Françoise WASSERMAN (eds.). *Vagues. Une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*. Mâcon: Editions W, M.N.E.S., 1992, pp. 77–85.

<sup>4</sup> DESVALLÉES, André. Présentation. 1992. In DESVALLÉES, André, Marie-Odile DE BARRY and Françoise WASSERMAN (eds.). *Vagues. Une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*. Mâcon: Editions W, M.N.E.S., 1992, pp. 15–40.

<sup>1</sup> ZUBIAUR, Francisco J. *Curso de museología*. Gijón: TREA, 2004, p. 17.



definition proposed by ICOM 2007 is: *“a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution at the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and recreation”*. However, this definition is currently in need of reformulation, which shows the difficulty of establishing a timeless and definitive definition. The diverse definitions proposed by ICOM condition the current conceptualization of the museum institution. In the case of Spain, article 1 of Royal Decree 620/1987, which approves the museum regulations, defines Museums as *“institutions of permanent character that acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit, in order to communicate and exhibit, for purposes of study, education and contemplation, sets and collections of historical, artistic, scientific and technical value or of any other cultural nature”*.<sup>5</sup> This definition emanates from the one proposed by ICOM. At present, the redefinition of Museum in Spain requires an update to the new times that incorporates in a decisive way the social component. This incorporation of the social component, as it could not be otherwise, must be transferred to the museological and museographic discourses that the Museum makes available to society.

The previous paragraph is only intended to show how the concept of the museum and the functions of the museum institution have changed and is continually changing. This evolution is reflected in the definition and is an indicator that the museum is a living and changing institution. In general

terms, we could summarize these evolutions over the centuries by saying that there are two pillars in museums: objects and people. In this evolution, the focus has shifted from objects, objects that are testimonies of culture or of nature, to people.<sup>6</sup> It should be emphasized that both are needed, but the object has been reinvented, has transcended itself and has been made available to people to develop numerous functions that can affect in an integral way personal and social contexts, that can affect psychological and bodily spheres: emotional, cognitive, spiritual and relational.

But how can this affection for so many spheres and personal and social contexts be understood? Well, because the museum fact is not alien to human beings, it is almost part of their evolutionary development, if we consider the person within the bio-psycho-social model. The human being, generally at an early age of 11 or 12 years, already develops an eagerness to collect.<sup>7</sup> Somehow collecting, having objects becomes a way of relating to the world and to others. The human being is also no stranger to history, history, as a fact inherent to human life as a shaping of culture that is collected in a memorandum. These memoranda are generally collected in the form of objects, which are true traces of human activity and the facts of its historical development. Both tangible and intangible heritage are thus susceptible to being housed by the museum institution and are collected as the human being walks through history.

## Objects and people: a human dialectic for the future

The path outlined in the previous section has led us in recent years, especially as a result of the enormous social development brought about by the industrial revolution, but above all, in the 21st century, and as a result of the development brought about by globalization and the digital world, to the museum institution being faced with several challenges of enormous significance:

a) On the one hand, humanity, as is evident from reading the classical Greek texts, Icelandic sagas, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Eastern philosophers, has been the same. The fundamental needs, bodily and psychological, the passions, their spirituality, the human being as a person and his relationship with his social and natural perspective, is ultimately the same: the search for beauty and truth, for love. Human passions are the same. Nothing has changed. In essence it is the same. We only have to look at the tremendous timeliness of texts written more than XX centuries ago. In this sense, the challenges of human knowledge are the same.

b) On the other hand, the social form is changing, contexts change, ideology changes, politics changes, the world changes, develops, lives better and people establish new conceptions, new ways of living in society, new ways of understanding reality, of advancing in the knowledge of what things are, of what our world is, what the universe is, what we are, what our purpose is. But there are also many other needs related to the sphere of leisure, aimed at contributing to the so-called welfare state, where people can be and live happier, and this situational evolution with specific needs for people in each

<sup>5</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. Evolución del concepto de museo. *Revista general de información y documentación*, 1992, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 85–98.

<sup>6</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. *Manual de Museología*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> REMPLEIN, Heinz. *Tratado de psicología evolutiva*. Barcelona: Labor, 1980, p. 458.

era, also brings challenges for the museum institution.

In this context of the universality of the human person diachronic in time and of this context of synchrony with the time we are living in the first half of the 21st century, the museum institution tries to reinvent itself in order to occupy a necessary place for society in a constant reconceptualization, but without forgetting that “*every future plunges into the past*”.<sup>8</sup> But what is the objective of this reconceptualization, of this reinvention? Undoubtedly, it must be to serve people in order to solve their needs and help them in their personal and social development. Ah, yes, needs, but what needs? Well, as many as possible. That is the key to the upcoming of the museum of the future. And if the museum does not do it, someone else will, with the risk of watching impassively as its place is taken by another more necessary equipment.

It would not be strange that in the not too distant future there will be a personalized museum that can respond to all the needs of each person and each social group. It would not be strange that in the not too distant future the museum will be inside the home of each person or each family, or each school, being able to physically or virtually display the objects and collections that meet the specific knowledge needs of the people who are there. The Museum as a teacher. The Museum-robot that helps you learn with exact or scale replicas of objects from museums around the world. The virtual museum in the smartphone, the museum implanted in a chip in the brain. In short, there are many possibilities that the future allows us to suspect.

But let us return to the present. One of the strengths of the museum is that it is shaped as a bearer of values inherent to the human. That is why it must know what its mission is and stay away from manipulative ideologies, but it must also know how to take advantage of ideologies when they become centers of interest for the population. It must be truly inclusive, being accessible and responding to all the needs of all the different people. Very ambitious, yes, but possible. To take advantage of ideologies means to take advantage of the social context, to give response to the needs that the cultural in the temporary present time is demanding. It would be, one could say, to use the trendic topics to mobilize the citizenship towards the museum, trying to fulfill its objectives. It means taking advantage of the centers of interest of each person, starting from their intrinsic motivation, to help them in their training, in their development.

The Museum cannot be something static. It has to be dynamic and not close its own doors, but rather open them wide, and it can even become a means of mass communication, as long as it does not renounce its signs of identity<sup>9</sup>. But what are signs of identity in the future for a museum? Surely its definition will be based on respect for its objects, but putting the focus on people, on respect for human values and possibly on renouncing to some corseted signs of identity and opening up to broader and more inclusive signs of identity, that is, by opening up to other fields that will be assumed by the museum institution, as a social center of first order.

And why do you need the objects? Because they are its essence. It is through them that it presents the testimonies, the meanings, its significant capacity, its programming to open itself to society, to educate the population, to provide an experiential space, where significant life experiences (SLE) are produced.<sup>10</sup> Because without objects it would be something else, it would no longer be a museum. But be careful because objects can be real or virtual, material or immaterial. With objects we may be able to respond to an increasingly important, demanding and diverse educational task. Yes, but the educational task is not the only one, or at least not only the cognitive dimension of the educational task. The affective, relational world is also part of the Museum's work. The Museum is a center of socialization. Emotions must be experienced, and better with people, in order to develop good emotional intelligence. The museum is a center that generates experiences, whether in person or virtually. The museum helps the integral, personal and social development, it teaches to live in community.

What will we see in the future? Even if we dream, it will be very difficult for us to anticipate the enormous changes that are going to take place in the world, perhaps we cannot even anticipate the changes that will occur in the next 20 years. Changes in society and changes in people. That is why it is important that the museum of the future be prepared to incorporate these changes into its museum dynamics. If it does not, it will be out of the game. It will not be able to compete with other physical or virtual equipments.

<sup>8</sup> JOYCE, James. *Ulises*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1922/1984, p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. Evolución del concepto de museo. *Revista general de información y documentación*, 1992, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 85–98.

<sup>10</sup> TANNER, Thomas. Significant life experiences: a new research area in environmental education. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 1980, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 20–24.



## The metamuseum: concept and main characteristics

What does this current situation of uncertainty and accelerated change lead<sup>11</sup> to in terms of the museum institution? Well, perhaps it could lead to what we could call the *metamuseum*. What do we mean by this term? A museum that reflects on itself. A museum of museums, an archetype of a museum that responds to people's needs, whatever they may be, since it caters to the individual and the social, to all kinds of spheres of the person and to all kinds of intelligences. The metamuseum is constructivist and generates an experiential space, where everything can happen: it is amazing, surprising, silent or noisy, musical, conversational, intimate, popular, social, individual, it is everything. But it is because it can be. Because it has the capacity for it. It is serious and it is fun. It is banal and profound. It is linear or free, it is simple or complex, it is directorial or self-directed, it is modular or holistic. It is local and it is global. It is bounded and it is unbounded. It is just one museum and it is all museums.

What are the keys to the metamuseum? It is to build bridges with the personal and the social, it is to connect, also with networks. These are some of the keys to success, not understood as success in terms of the number of people who visit, but in terms of the meaningful experiences it is able to provide. Walking through a museum does not mean learning, nor does it mean that experiences happen to the person. The key is how to connect with people. I once read that when an old man dies in Africa, they say

a museum disappears.<sup>12</sup> I could not bring to this reflection a more accurate phrase. And I am not only talking about intangible heritage, I also rescue in that old man, in his interior, the museum city and all forms and types of museums. Because that old man or woman is the universal human being, perhaps the hominid who took shelter in a cave and represented on a cold wall a hand, his or her hand and the archetype of the hand. He or she is the one who gives meaning to museums, or rather, they are the museums, because the museum is ultimately in the form of experiences in the souls of all people. Let's help people become living museums, let's help develop individuals and provide them with all kinds of knowledge, relationships and experiences. Let us help to weave the multicolored web of LIVING in museums, so that life is included in the museum and people, in turn, can contribute to bringing museums to life, because museums should be made of people.

Although the present is neither the past nor the future, although the future does not exist, the way in which society is accelerating, with drastic changes that are perhaps too continuous,<sup>13</sup> means that the present is becoming increasingly synonymous with the future. This is why we can say that, more and more, the museum of the present has to be the museum of the future. What will this museum of the future, this metamuseum, be like? Here we propose some of its characteristics:

1. Synchronic-diachronic.  
The museum therefore has

a temporal vision, along with a timeless vision.

2. Resilient. The museum must be resilient and anticipate the future.
3. Independent. The museum is independent of ideologies, but adapts to them
4. Inclusive. It is accessible and inclusive for all types of people.
5. Interdisciplinary. The museum must break down the barriers that constrain it by opening up to the interdisciplinary. It will not make sense to be classified as a science museum, an art museum or any other type of museum. Those barriers will make less and less sense. That is, a museum can house art objects, but work any kind of content within the museum: medicine, nursing, philosophy, architecture, values, emotional intelligence, creative intelligence, whatever, art, dance, theater.... Whatever my audiences need. In this sense, the objects are polysemic, including an interdisciplinary perspective.
6. Interactive. Interactivity rules. The object must provide experiences through interactivity. Non-interactivity is an obstacle to overcome.
7. Personalized. The museum must be personalized, it must respond to the interests and expectations of each person individually and collectively. The more the population is segmented, the easier it will be to cater to the particular interests of each segment. The more you personalize, the easier it is to respond to those needs. The more you get someone to come to a museum, if you

<sup>11</sup> HAN, Byung-Chul. *El aroma del tiempo. Un ensayo filosófico sobre el arte de demorarse*. [The scent of time. A philosophical essay on the art of lingering]. Barcelona: Herder editorial, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> LEE, Y. Una urna para preservar la vida: salvaguardia y legado del patrimonio cultural inmaterial. *Noticias del ICOM*, 2004, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 5-7.

<sup>13</sup> HAN, Byung-Chul. *El aroma del tiempo. Un ensayo filosófico sobre el arte de demorarse*. [The scent of time. A philosophical essay on the art of lingering]. Barcelona: Herder editorial, 2016.

respond with quality to what they need and expect, the easier it will be for them to come back. In this sense, each person or each group can create their own museum.

8. Constructivist. Learning is constructivist, through experiences that provide “feeling, thinking and action”.<sup>14</sup> The museum should be constructivist, creating an unforgettable experiential space.
9. Multidimensional. It provides multidimensional learning<sup>15</sup> in all types of educational contexts: formal, non-formal and informal, encouraging self-directed and non-linear learning.
10. Work in networks. Networks are one of the keys to success in the future.
11. Real and virtual. The museum must house both the real and the virtual.
12. It teaches to think. If we want to be responsible with museum work, we cannot leave aside the competence of learning to think. We must promote it. This promotes the formation of independent individuals, freer, more autonomous, freer thinkers, more masters of their own lives. The museum should not give up this task.
13. Indefinition. The metamuseum includes a concrete indefinition that will support the complexity

of the world not from an analytical perspective of dissection by parts, but from a holistic and deep analysis that includes the complexity of reality as it is. This lack of definition will provide it with great versatility and adaptability.

14. De-localized. The museum of the future is a delocalized museum. No, we do not mean unlocated, but delocalized. It is a ubiquitous museum. You can call it from everywhere and it comes to you. It promotes the local and the universal.<sup>16</sup> It exists in one geographical location but it is in all geographical locations. The building is just another object in the museum. Sublime, enabling, attractive, motivating, tremendous.
15. Intelligent. It helps to develop multiple intelligences. The integral vision promotes the development of all the intelligences of the human being, including creative, kinesthetic, musical, emotional, transcendent, etc.
16. Open. It functions almost like a supraorganism with a cellular structure, self-sufficient, resilient and ready to interact with people.

In the metamuseum the famous quote by D’Ors: “(...) *to the museum one goes to admire*”,<sup>17</sup> could be formulated as follows: “*to the metamuseum one goes to (or the metamuseum comes to you to) admire, participate and learn, grow, experience, share, include, create, dream*”. In this sense,

the metamuseum belongs to a fifth generation, surpassing the 4th described by Beyer.<sup>18</sup> This fifth generation is already the generation in which people choose the objects and even generate them. The person is the absolute center of interest of the various objects. Objects are adapted to people’s centers of interest and not the other way around. The service of the object reaches its maximum. Objects, virtual or real, existing or created, help in the development of people precisely to the extent that they need it, but not only on an individual level, but also on a social level. And people help objects in their preservation, interrelation and generation of discourses. Objects love people and admire them and talk to them and people listen to what objects have to tell them and talk to them, because it is just of their interest and just what they were looking for, just at the necessary level to understand the discourse, just at the necessary level to learn, just generating the right experience, the experience sought in that walk together that allows the metamuseum.

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<sup>14</sup> AUSUBEL, David P. *Psicología educativa. Un punto de vista cognoscitivo*. México: Trillas, 1976; NOVAK, Joseph D. *A Theory of Education*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

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## STUDIE/ARTICLES

MUSEUMS IN THE ERA OF DECOLONISATION:  
THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2022-1-2>

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## ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

Museums are spaces designed to preserve and disseminate knowledge about peoples and cultures. It is a place that keeps items that serve as evidence of history and identity frozen in time for knowledge purposes. Museums were a direct result of elites exhibiting their collections and cabinets of curiosity to the amazement of visitors in their homes. Over time, private collections became museum institutions of knowledge and repositories that have become pride of nation-states. As learning spaces, museums enhance education and enjoyment of visitors, through varied cultures displayed from their collections. However, museums are not to be perceived as entirely western supporting colonial ideology but they should substantiate national history from varied cultural perspectives that fosters identity formation and communal history.

The paper focuses on how the persistent call for decolonisation within museums has been perceived and adopted in Nigeria. Using mixed methodology, that included archival and historic research, data collection was through surveys, personal observation, interviews to ascertain museum types within Nigeria. The paper describes museum concept as a cultural construct that aligns to African ideology. Finally, the paper concludes that the low visitors number to museums in Nigeria

is due to a disconnect between institution and the citizenry due to its colonial foundation. Consequently, emphasising the urgent need for decolonisation that adopt local model and further influences the design of new museums in Nigerian.

**Muzea v éře dekolonizace na příkladu Nigérie**

Muzea jsou instituce určené k zachování a šíření vědomostí o lidských společnostech a kulturách. V prostorech muzeí jsou uchovávány materiální doklady historie a identity, které mohou být kdykoliv využity pro účely výzkumu a poznání. Muzea se vyvinula jako přímý následovník dřívějších forem prezentace, kdy elity vystavovaly své sbírky a kabinety kuriozit ve svých domovech k ohromení návštěvníků. Postupem času se soukromé sbírky přetrafovaly v muzejní instituce vědění a uchovávání, které se staly chloubou národních států. Prostřednictvím vystavování sbírek předmětů pocházejících z různých kultur poskytují muzea svým návštěvníkům možnost rozšířit si své vědomosti a získat nové zážitky. Muzea však nemají být vnímána jako výhradně západní instituce podporující koloniální ideologii, ale měla by prezentovat dějiny jednotlivých národů z pohledu různých kultur a podporovat tak formování identity a kolektivní historie. Článek se zaměřuje na to, jakým způsobem bylo toto vytrvalé volání po dekolonizaci v muzeích vnímáno v Nigérii a jak se jeho

výsledky projevují v praxi. Sběr dat probíhal za využití kombinace metod archivního a historického výzkumu, tedy prostřednictvím průzkumů, osobního pozorování a rozhovorů, které měly za cíl zjistit, jaké typy muzeí se vyskytují v Nigérii. V článku je koncept muzea popsána jako kulturní konstrukt, který se přizpůsobuje africké ideologii. Studie nakonec dochází k závěru, že nízký počet návštěvníků muzeí v Nigérii je způsoben odmítavým postojem občanů k těmto institucím kvůli jejich dřívějšímu založení představiteli koloniální moci. Náléhavá potřeba dekolonizace, která dá prostor lokálním zvyklostem a bude mít další vliv na vznik a charakter nových muzeí v Nigérii, je proto stále aktuální.

## KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

*antiquities – ancestral collections – colonial museum – decolonisation*  
*historické památky – sbírky předků – koloniální museum – dekolonizace*

## Introduction

Museums have continued to be active in shaping world knowledge since 600 years ago. Over time, there have been persistent and significant changes in its academic and intellectual frameworks since the 19th century. However, the direction and the speed of change in its administrative environment over the last two decades have been unprecedented. It has continued to influence how the institution is



perceived and defined. A definition of a museum provides an explanatory guide to the concepts and ideology surrounding its establishment and understanding. Such concepts, however, are guided by a combination of philosophies often dependent on cultural underpinnings, context and content. As a result, museums are no longer simply exhibition spaces that represent the knowledge and truth of the histories they represent; instead, they have become sites where people participate, interpret and buy, rather than visit and become educated.<sup>1</sup> However, in this case, people are categorised as visitors, consumers or stakeholders.

Museums are also identified or defined by the types and focus of their collections. Nonetheless, they do not exist in a vacuum but highlight the thoughts and materiality of a society or people. Because collections or objects represented serve a specific cultural or utilitarian purpose for the people, thus, museum collections are an attestation to everyday life and how man has fashioned specific tools by way of their technology to survive their environment. These collections are categorised by the institutional taxonomy but not by the people who own and use them daily. According to Willet,<sup>2</sup> museum collections were objects made by the people, of the people for the people. Hence, they serve a distinctive role those specific people can use as identifiers. Subsequently, defining a museum will require understanding the culture and setting that the institution seeks to serve. As such, there seems to be no straightforward definition that fits all-region and cultures. Due to the unsatisfactory definition

for museums, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) through four consultations at varied levels decided to review the 2007 definition of museum that states that, “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for education, study and enjoyment”.<sup>3</sup>

The above quoted definition was adopted in 2015 by all UNESCO 195 member states.<sup>4</sup> However, the ICOM definition interrogated several critical questions in museology, including the museum’s economic role, social function, and the necessity of carrying out research to arrive at a workable definition that will be inclusive.<sup>5</sup> Inclusivity of the definition accounts for diverse cultures and their understanding of museums’ past, present and future. To this end, the ICOM formed the *International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM)* for different regions. The committee further accounted for the multi-lingual nature of the world and different notions of what a museum stands for. However, the definition is not static but problematic as it will likely change with a continued shift in ideology, culture and cultural perspectives. As such, present

parameters for defining museums are not the same as in the past and are likely to change. Hence the new definition that highlights all that museum is with consideration of region and varied context.

The proposed was voted upon on the 24th August 2022 during the Extraordinary General Assembly, in Prague. The definition states that “A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing”.<sup>6</sup>

It is also startling that the definition of a museum is considered an English construct. Thus, presents the concept of museums as anglophone. Remarkably, International Commission for Museum (ICOFOM) considers the multi-lingual nature of the various region to arrive at a working definition. In doing this however, the International Commission for Museum (ICOFOM) methodology considered academic languages such as French, Brazilian Portuguese, Latin American Spanish, and English-speaking regions.<sup>7</sup> The definition, however, seems to alienate Africana or African languages. With Africa divided into either Anglophone or Francophone highlighting the scramble for Africa, neo-colonialism is presently and persistently subtly

<sup>3</sup> Museums, International Council of Museums. 2007. In *ICOM International Council of Museums* [online]. 24 August 2007 [accessed 2021-12-21]. Available from www: <<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Recommendation Concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections. In *United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization* [online]. 2015 [accessed 2022-08-17]. Available from www: <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/museums/recommendation-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-museums-and-collections/>>.

<sup>5</sup> BROWN, Karen and Françoise MAIRESSE. The definition of the museum through its social role. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 2018, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 525–539.

<sup>6</sup> Museum Definition. In *ICOM International Council of Museums* [online]. 2022 [accessed 2022-08-26]. Available from www: <<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>>.

<sup>7</sup> BROWN, Karen and Françoise MAIRESSE. The definition of the museum through its social role. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 2018, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 525–539.

<sup>1</sup> EDSON, Gary and David DEAN. *The handbook for museums*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> WILLETT, Frank. Museums and the Image of Africa. *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 1991, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 43–54.



reinforced in African museums. Such colonial languages negate the idea that museums are spaces that highlight people's ideology and connectedness to their past and future. The exclusion of African indigenous language presents the museums as foreign institutions that seeks to preserve and present specific one-sided story. To this end, the paper seeks to examine the concept of decolonisation within museums and how it is perceived in Nigeria. Understanding the concept of decolonising museum can further contribute to improving museum services in the region, such as increasing visitor number and engagement and encouraging inclusivity.

### Methodology

The mixed methodology approach includes archival and historical research that examines how museums were established, understood and the need for decolonisation in the region. Through personal observation, interviews, roundtable discussions with curators and directors' primary data were collected. Roundtable discussion was conducted with 10 museums in attendance representing the six geopolitical zones (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South and South West) of Nigeria. The selected representing institutions were chosen to have a representative of 90 public and private museums within Nigeria. The museums invited included the only public/private institution with contemporary art collections and the only Natural history museum in the country. Aside type of ownership, focus of museum collection was also considered as a selection criterion. As result, diverse museum types, focus, size, location and ownership were in attendance for the discussion. Participants were purposively selected rather than from

a statistically representative sample of a broader population.

Secondary data was collected from relevant literatures on museum decolonisation and reports from institutions such as International Council of Museums, International Commission for Museum (ICOFOM) and *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations* (UNESCO). The literature and reports were to examine the definition of museum and the need for decolonisation of museums in Nigeria. Survey to determine number of museums in Nigeria was carried out between June 2019 to September 2019. Data gathered from the survey was used in determine participants for the discussion. There was no existing directory that provided the necessary details about Nigerian museums until early 2020. Presently, 52 museums are listed on the *National Commission for Museums and Monuments* (NCMM) website.<sup>8</sup> However, data about their sizes, collection focus, types of ownership, location and contact persons were neither available nor accessible online. Thus, making it challenging to determine museums numbers in Nigeria. The lack of data presented the need for a survey to be carried out.<sup>9</sup> The survey to document the number of museums, collection focus and type started in June 2019. The research data revealed 64 public museums, 52 being directly overseen by National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) whilst 26 private museums of varied focus. 21 of the 90 museums were visited to conduct personal observation. Due to security challenges within the country COVID pandemic

followed by contact with selected curators was carried out virtually.

### Defining Museums

What is a museum? Defining a museum could be seen as an easy task by interrogating the history of museums but often not necessarily so. This is due to the simple fact that the idea of collecting and deciding what to preserve to produce knowledge is not static but dynamic. The structure of knowledge has continued to change from the renaissance, the classical down, to the modern age based on the prevailing epistemological context. As a result, content and context were guided by rules and structure of a particular time in history. The concept of a museum began in the 13th century initially through the accumulations of materials (natural and artificial things) in cabinets of curiosity.<sup>10</sup> Elites show off accumulated wealth and expanded knowledge through collections from their explorative travels to emphasise enlightenment and a deep understanding of a subject matter.<sup>11</sup> With time these private collections and repositories were geared towards reforming the citizenry.

At inception, museums, like other amenities, served the purpose of developing citizens' mental and moral health. As a result, museums were not perceived as spaces for leisure or education but as a reformatory tool where the elite remoulded the commoner.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, personal collections

<sup>10</sup> HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> BUCKINGHAM, James Silk. *National Evils and Practical Remedies: With a Plan for a Model Town*. London: Peter Jackson, Lae Fisher, Son and Co, 1849; GOODE, G. Brown. *The principles of museum administration*. [s.l.]: Coultas & Volans, 1895; BENNET, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> BENNET, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> List of national museums in Nigeria. In *National Commission for Museums and Monuments* [online]. [accessed 2022-06-22]. Available from [www.museum.ng/museums/national-museums-list](http://www.museum.ng/museums/national-museums-list).

<sup>9</sup> The survey was commissioned and sponsored by *European Union Institute for Culture* (Nigeria Cluster) as part of work carried out towards making *Nigerian Museum houses of Identity*.

of individuals like Sir Hans Sloan, Sir Robbert Cotton and Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, formed the foundation of the British Museum.<sup>13</sup> According to Hooper-Greenhill,<sup>14</sup> museums are not pre-constituted entities produced in the same way at all times; hence, their definition will continue to evolve. Before they became public institutions open to all, museums existed as private entities, previously property of kings and elites. Such private establishment was that of Sir Hans Sloane, whose private museum was one of London's sights and located on No 3. Bloomsbury Place. Sir Hans Sloane was a physician, naturalist, traveller, and collector of many objects; his botanical collection was considered the "*finest natural history collection in the world*".<sup>15</sup>

Through such assemblage, museums became disciplinary apparatus to understand varied concepts and ideas. When there was a need to emerge new facts about earlier accepted concepts, museums also became the fundamental mechanism that enabled the construction and dissemination of a new set of standards that were unpopular with ancient ideology.<sup>16</sup> Such new values have continued to emerge and define how museum collections and the situation surrounding their accumulation, storage and display are perceived and openly discussed. Museums are opportunities for a nation's cultural and natural resources to be harnessed and organised toward

the construction of national identity. In situations where diverse ideologies and concepts define national identity, for example, in the case of Nigeria, the museum becomes that space that encourages the inclusive construction of history and distinctiveness against all odds. As a result, national museums of unity across the country were established to highlight differences and similarities whilst facilitating unified identity and knowledge of various ethnic groups that made up different regions of the country.

Over time, museums have taken centre stage in societal and communal developments to inspire a better understanding of the history and identity of people. Further classification of museums is by their collection of impressive visual proponents, representational strategies and modes of expression. Through tangible and intangible collections representing cultures, the museum seeks to highlight the critical achievement of man. Such collections are of pivotal significance in understanding the concept of a museum as a place where objects are exhibited for education, enlightenment and enjoyment. Being socially and historically located, museums tend to "*bear the imprint of social relations beyond their walls and the present. Hence, they are never just spaces to play out wider social relationships but exist to create a cultural context within them*".<sup>17</sup>

Museums have evolved from static spaces to become more dynamic and inclusive. By introducing new technology into museum and museum practices, new values, functions, and a new perspective on the varied subject matter have

emerged. In line with Foucault's,<sup>18</sup> museums have become part of the network of multiple relations between population, territory and wealth. Though considered a colonial construct, the definition has continued to emphasise their global universality and influence. Ironically, museums have always been part of African livelihood, where they are present in simple living concept as a three-tier hierarchy. Despite having an indigenous model, the European concept of institutional collection and static exhibition space has become the mainstay of understanding culture and identity within Nigeria.

### Nigerian Perspective of Museum

Nigerian art came to recognition and limelight in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to studies of African art by the West under the general term "Negro Art". At the time, Nigeria not only produced the finest specimen of ancient art but also produced works and varied crafts that developed far beyond what was termed primitive.<sup>19</sup> Murray<sup>20</sup> argued that African published works of art in the 1930's included the bronzes and Ivories from Benin Kingdom in present Nigeria. Nigeria, a construct of the colonial administration, has no unified history as the people are of diverse ethnicity and distinctive languages. Some of the spoken languages and indigenous artefacts are similar with a bit of variation that allowed them to be grouped together despite distinctive features. The diversity is presently being exhibited in national museums of unity established across the country since 1989 with National Museum of Unity, Abeokuta and constitute part of the 52 public

13 SOGBESAN, Oluwatoyin Z. *The potential of digital representation: The changing meaning of the life 'bronzes' from pre-colonial life to the post-colonial digital British Museum*. London: University of London, 2015. Doctoral dissertation.

14 HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992.

15 CROOK, Joseph Mordaunt. *The British Museum*. London: Allen Lane, 1972, p. 42.

16 HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992.

17 MACDONALD, Sharon. Introduction. In MACDONALD, Sharon and Gordon FYFE (eds.). *Theorizing museums: representing identity and diversity in a changing world*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 4.

18 FOUCAULT, Michel. *Governmentality. Ideology and Consciousness*, 1979, vol. 6, pp. 5–21.

19 MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

20 Ibidem.



Fig. 1: Main vehicular entrance into Museum of Unity, Ibadan Oyo State established in 2002. Source: Oluwatoyin Sogbesan Collection, 2021.

museums (figure 1). Although the establishment of public museums devoted to collections and conservation came to Nigeria much later than many other African countries, preserving works with high spiritual significance was not a new idea.<sup>21</sup>

Nigerian art consists of music, dance and sculptures with intrinsic and extrinsic value with their knowledge and meaning embedded in their oral history.<sup>22</sup> The art overlap in its uses and forms. For instance, carved sculptures are utilised in dances during communal or religious festivals with appropriate music. Considering that these objects were not produced as art but as utilitarian or sacred objects, they highlight traditional material culture before the establishment of the colonial institution called “museum”. There were no earlier writings though many have continued to emerge

about Nigerian art forms; the antiquities assist in communicating the heritage and history of the people. Artworks from Nigeria during colonial administration were treated with disdain and seen as decadence.<sup>23</sup> Such perception is likely due to a lack of understanding of the culture of the people. For example, the Benin works were not created for display in a western museum but in a local court, thus having a significant value within their original context.<sup>24</sup> Wood art, on the other hand, was and still is of importance due to communal demands ranging from religious recreation to showing many signs of vitality and wealth during festivals. Such utilitarian demands tend to drive production than the need for art.<sup>25</sup>

The end of colonial rule in Nigeria in 1960 resulted in reconsidering late nineteenth-

century cultural and imperial political paradigms. Colonialism has also subsequently generated substantial changes across many disciplines in the postcolonial era, including anthropology and museology. The changes across the discipline also affected museum practices with the call for decolonisation. Thus, museums need to be perceived and defined from an inclusive understanding of the indigenous people they tend to showcase as part of the history and identity of Nigeria. To this end, defining museums from a Nigerian perspective is paramount to understanding how the institution is taking centre stage in constructing societal and communal history and identity. Such definition will provide the framework for decolonisation and shift from imperial models of seeing.

Furthermore, museum definition from a Nigerian perspective has the potential to offer insight into other African states. As defined by various scholars, museums indicate multiple overlapping functions that make them spaces of contestable identities. Definitions discussed earlier in this paper argues that a museum is a space for education, enlightenment and enjoyment. However, over time, museum definition has continued to evolve and strayed from their original missions to preserve and educate, with critics suggesting that they may become arenas for pleasure rather than education.<sup>26</sup> Defining museum in Nigeria will require understanding the culture as it regards material objects, value, preservation and principles guiding exhibitions. Hence a definitive definition, like everywhere else, can be problematic as it varies from one region to another and

<sup>21</sup> FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124.

<sup>22</sup> MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

<sup>26</sup> MCPHERSON, Gayle. Public memories and private tastes: The shifting definitions of museums and their visitors in the UK. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2006, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 44–57.



from one culture to another. However, museum definition presently depends mainly on their collections, mission, and whom they intend to attract and not tilted towards the communities they present. As a result, museums in Nigeria are classified according to their collections as laid out by colonial paradigms, such as ethnographic, archaeological, natural history, slave history, traditional architecture, war, science and contemporary art. According to Harrison,<sup>27</sup> museums could be seen as several things – “as leisurely entertainment, as passively educational experiences, as necessary, if little contemplated, repositories of history and objects of value, or as symbols of community cultural maturity”. From Harrison’s<sup>28</sup> perspective, museums can be defined from varied concept and context dependent on culture. But how are symbols of community cultural maturity determined? What external benchmark are used for such measurement? Labadi<sup>29</sup> argued that the definition of culture over time has impacted on understandings of developments and vice versa. It is such development that are likely to impact on tangible and intangible elements that constitute cultural maturity. However, the definitions of culture have ranged from constricted humanistic understanding that refer to culture as artistic activities, literature, and heritage to the anthropological standpoint where culture is seen as a whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterises a society or group, including mode of life, value

systems, traditions and beliefs.<sup>30</sup> Culture is simply the way of life of a particular people.<sup>31</sup> These definitions and understandings indicate that culture is diverse and varies between social groups. Consequently, no culture is superior to another because they all have varied codes of references and regime of value.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, only a cultural parameter within a culture can be used as a benchmark and terms of reference. Cultural maturity should thus be based on specific community value regime, not external factors. Hence, Okpoko<sup>33</sup> argues that the idea of a museum predates the colonial era as the idea is found in shrines, temples and palaces of kings. To this end, there is a need for decolonisation to allow local cultural perspective to emerge. For decolonisation to take place, it is imperative that museums are understood from the local standpoint.

Museums in Nigeria will be described on three levels: home, shrine and palace (family, religion and government). Understanding these three levels that depict the private, private/public, and public museum will provide a glimpse into how the people perceive and represent their culture which is not aligned with the colonial concept. Museums are not an unfamiliar phenomenon in African culture to which Nigeria belong, as their concept addresses different levels of representational, interpretation and educational spaces. All that represents identity, family history, culture and a sense of place and belonging in Africa



Fig. 2: Inside a family living space with objects that can attest to cultural history. Source: Oluwatoyin Sogbesan Collection, 2019.

starts with a private collection in the family home/compound. The home, irrespective of ethnicity, is a foothold for all that constitutes an individual’s identity. Nigeria’s family home or compound is constructed with spirituality and materiality as the primary reference with a unique spatial identity. Each architectural element, such as carved doors panels, wooden posts, windows, and roof members, all bear designs and inscriptions that inform a visitor about the family’s identity, belief, occupation, clan and financial status. The homestead or traditional designs and spatial requirements vary in shape and size from region to region with decorative elements, forms and colours that serve as identity markers as well as historical records of events (figure 2). Within this level of the museum (private museum) is wood art for domestic use, indicating a good understanding of proportion and form, such as cups, bowls,

27 HARRISON, Julia. Museums as agencies of neocolonialism in a postmodern world. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, 1997, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 42.

28 Ibidem, pp. 41–65.

29 LABADI, Sophia. *Rethinking Heritage for Sustainable Development*. London: UCL Press, 2022.

30 Ibidem.

31 GEERTZ, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Book Inc Publishers, 2000.

32 APPADURAI, Arjun. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

33 OKPOKO, Alex Ikechukwu. *Fundamentals of Museum Practice*. Nsukka: Afro Orbis, 2006.



Fig. 3: Some collections in storage in public museum. Source: Oluwatoyin Sogbesan Collection, 2020.

spoons, mortar, pestles, combs and stools.<sup>34</sup>

Like a colonial museum, the home becomes the educational space where a visitor learns about the host/ owner through exhibited tangible and intangible collections of cultural values. In a household, inherited carvings from one generation have become part of the paraphernalia of the family god or deity. This religious relic, however, is replaceable as the need arises; hence old works considered as works of art are likely to degenerate, decay and be discarded.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, discarding some types of carvings is respectful and unavoidable such

as the *Ikenga* from south-eastern Nigeria considered to enshrine a man's soul.<sup>36</sup>

The *Ikenga* is a wooden figure with some resemblance to the human body exclusive to Igbo men and some women of high reputation in the society.<sup>37</sup> There are diverse variations depending on region and status. The most notable part of an *Ikenga* is the pair of horn, display objects such as knife or tusk and body markings. It is believed to be an embodiment of spirituality that houses the *Chi* (personal god), *Ndichie* (ancestors), *Ike* (power), or *Aka Ikenga* (right hand).<sup>38</sup> The

indigenous definition or value ascribed to the *Ikenga* is based on the significance attached to the object. As a consecrated carving, an *Ikenga* serves as a connection between the owner and the spiritual realm. Offerings are made to an *Ikenga* to ensure success in any life venture.<sup>39</sup> The importance of the *Ikenga* to the Igbo man cannot be overemphasised hence it is appreciated active as the owner. In the case where an *Ikenga* becomes inactive due to death of the owner, an Igbo proverb supports total destruction – *Ikenga adigi ile, avwaa ya nku* (*Ikenga* that is inactive, cut it for firewood).<sup>40</sup> Consequently, an *Ikenga* is left to decay, symbolising death and the process of the body decomposing rather than being sold. Such decay of artworks and their replacement symbolises the natural process of growth, death, decay and rebirth that should not be taken for granted.

The next level of the museum is the shrines (religious buildings) of the traditional deity, which can also be considered a private/ public museum. It is a structure that accommodates members except by special invitation or open ceremonial festivals. The shrines of various deities are structures built using earth or other local, sustainable building materials, an open courtyard bounded by sacred trees, or no physical boundary in case of sacred grooves. The open structure highlights the existence of a museum without walls, a concept by Malraux (1965) and Friman (2006).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249; OKPOKO, Alex Ikechukwu. *Fundamentals of Museum Practice*. Nsukka: Afro Orbis, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> ANIAKOR, Chike. Structuralism in Ikenga: an ethno-aesthetic approach. *IKENGA: Journal of African Studies*, 1973, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 6–28.

<sup>37</sup> BENTOR, Eli. Life as an artistic process: Igbo Ikenga and Ofo. *African arts*, 1988, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 66–71.

<sup>38</sup> ODOITA, Okechukwu E. Universal cults and intra-diffusion: Igbo Ikenga in cultural retrospection. *African Studies Review*, 1973, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 73–82.

<sup>39</sup> BENTOR, Eli. Life as an artistic process: Igbo Ikenga and Ofo. *African arts*, 1988, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 66–71.

<sup>40</sup> AGBOGU, Herbert Tagbo. *The Art of Nri: A Heritage of the Philosophy*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria, 1974. BA Thesis. Mimeographed.

<sup>41</sup> MALRAUX, André. *Museum Without Walls*. London: Martin Seckler & Warburg, 1967. Translated From the French by Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price; FRIMAN, Helena. A museum



The structure usually houses cultural effigy like the *ibeji* dolls (figure 3) masks and carved wooden relics of various styles, shapes and sizes representing ancestors or deities or placed as decorations to honour the divinity.<sup>42</sup> Like the residential structures, the walls of the shrines bear murals associated with specific deities. Specific colours and zoomorphic signs associated with the deity can also be instantly identified with the worshipers through body art. These elements serve as visual messages that speak volumes. Drums, wood carvings of fine bowls and platters for religious purposes and divination are also found in shrines.<sup>43</sup> In this case, carvings and relics are communally owned by members of the same religious cult or society and kept in baskets, boxes or tied to rafters.

The final level of the African museum is within the institutional building – the king's palace. The palace is the home to unique collections that belong to the court and represents the whole village or town.<sup>44</sup> The king is regarded as the highest custodian of culture and serves as the primary gatekeeper; hence the best of the society's creativity is stored within the palace like the case of the Benin plaques, Queen *Idia* ivory mask, *Obalufon* bronze head, Ife bronzes to mention a few.<sup>45</sup> The palace is a space of authority speaking on behalf of the communal identity and history.

without walls. *Museum International*, 2006, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 55–59.

42 MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

43 Ibidem.

44 OKPOKO, Alex Ikechukwu. *Fundamentals of Museum Practice*. Nsukka: Afro Orbis, 2006.

45 SOGBESAN, Oluwatoyin Z. *The potential of digital representation: The changing meaning of the Ife 'bronzes' from pre-colonial Ife to the post-colonial digital British Museum*. London: University of London, 2015. Doctoral dissertation; PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

Further serves as a trusted layer to an individual or religious identity presented by the home or the shrine. Exquisite creations by the community always found their way to the palace in honour of the king. These collections are passed from generation to generation, attesting to the existence of the people, culture and validating oral histories. Some revered sacred collections are only seen in the public domain during major festivals. An inclusive concept where a common language of representation understood by all is used – depicting histories and identities of the people without western academic taxonomy. An example is the palace of the *Alaafin*, with over 20 courtyards dedicated to various functions. The courtyards are utilised for varied festivals and celebrations involving tangible and intangible cultural artefacts. Over time this palace has become a repository and educational space for artefacts and traditional architectural elements attesting to Yoruba culture.

### Colonial Perspective of Museum for Nigeria

The Department of Antiquities was set up in Nigeria by colonial administration after a precedent set by the British antiquities policies and practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>46</sup> The department in Nigeria was headed by Kenneth Murray, the first ever surveyor of antiquities in west Africa as inspector of ancient monuments. He was saddled with establishing and maintaining museums in the colonial era to the early part of the postcolonial.<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Murray's role consequently

mirrored that of Pitt Rivers in Britain by surveying antiquities for the colonial government. Hence, lofty projects were carried out towards setting out museums within Nigeria. Murray was to carry out acquisitions and purchases whilst he surveyed the country, and he expected that the establishment of a museum will follow collection practices.<sup>48</sup> Seven museums were established before independence, comprising two national museums in Jos and Lagos, whilst the remaining five were regional museums with various focuses.<sup>49</sup> With the assistance of archaeologist Bernard Fagg, proper archaeological practice for systematic and responsible excavation established antiquities legislation to regulate the export of objects deemed significant to Nigerian heritage.<sup>50</sup> An essential move to saving Nigeria from the scramble for Africa and her heritage. In this case, the museum was established to conserve and protect essential artefacts deemed national treasures.

Aside from setting up museums, the Department of Antiquities, her few professionals were responsible for discovering, preserving and studying the traditional material culture.<sup>51</sup> The study was to cover the present and piece together the past without any

48 HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96.

49 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124.

50 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124; HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96; PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

51 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124.

form of discrimination. However, Murray's intention differed from that of the colonial government, which envisaged setting up museums in Nigeria to educate and civilise the citizenry in line with the British ideology. Setting up the museums was therefore not to the benefit of the Nigerian community but for the enjoyment of the national artistry of the empire by expatriates. Museums further became a platform to spread European perspectives of the world at the disadvantage of Nigerian indigenous cultures and peoples.<sup>52</sup>

Though the concept of museology was practised in Nigeria in the form of small local museum and stores, the first National Museum built for the Nigerian Antiquity Service, in Jos opened to the public in 1952. The colonial establishment disregarded the local ideology of exhibiting.<sup>53</sup> But Kenneth Murray's, (the first director of antiquities), idea was not to alienate the people and their ways of exhibiting nonetheless, concentrated on collecting, conserving, preserving and exhibiting the finest antiquities considered necessary.<sup>54</sup> As a result, collecting took precedence over how the local people will want to be presented. However, collecting artefacts from different cultures to be kept in single storage controlled by the government was indeed a foreign ideology and practice. Of importance to Murray were artefacts made before 1918 and those produced specifically for religious purposes. These artefacts emphasise the position of religion and shrines as revered spaces. Murray, nonetheless, was tin-eared to the spiritual beliefs

of the people who felt offended by the suggestion that their ancestral objects be entrusted to the colonial government and displayed as exhibits.<sup>55</sup> An idea that seemed not only insulting but alienated the artefacts from their original purpose and place within communities. Coupled with a lack of trust in the colonial government, Murray had to enter into negotiations.<sup>56</sup> To this end, the people protested as their artefacts were collected for keepsake.<sup>57</sup> Thus, setting the tone and perception of the museum as a colonial construct designed to relegate or destroy cultural practices and belief systems that allowed objects to exist and die naturally.

Another aspect that founded the colonial museum in Nigeria was the need for repatriation. Repatriation has always been part of the dialogue that instituted museums and has now become an essential topic within museums locally and internationally. Issues regarding the repatriation of cultural artefacts to original owners affect Nigeria today as they did at the beginning with her artefacts scattered all over the West. Kenneth Murray advocated for repatriation more for the benefit of the Nigerian citizen to develop an understanding of their diverse culture and possibly grow an international audience.<sup>58</sup> However, his collection reflected

the country's diversity but was displayed for the enjoyment of European audiences.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, establishing and running a museum in colonial Nigeria also required staffing, and Murray ensured that indigenous people were included as part of the workforce.<sup>60</sup> To a large extent, the inclusion of local people and the ability to experience some of the artefacts they have no access to without barriers possibly accounted for the throng of visitors to the museum in the early days of its establishment.<sup>61</sup> To this end, Bernard Fagg<sup>62</sup> reported that the public was able to "satisfy the natural desire to touch specimen, and none suffered any damage, nor were there cases of vandalism. Thus, fulfilling the objectives of the founding fathers (Kenneth Murray and Bernard Fagg) that museums in Nigeria should be a place with consideration first for Nigerians."<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the museum was a place for social and educational benefit where Nigeria could be free from economic dependence on Britain over time. Kenneth Murray considered the economic prosperity associated with culture and advocated that industrialisation must occur with culture in mind.<sup>64</sup> An idea he adopted from *West African Arts Industries and Social*

52 MACKENZIE, John M. *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2009.

53 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124.

54 PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

55 HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96; PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

56 MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

57 PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

58 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124; HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96.

59 HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96.

60 Ibidem.

61 PHILLIPS, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2021.

62 FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 127.

63 HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96.

64 MURRAY, Kenneth C. Art in Nigeria: the need for a museum. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1942, vol. 41, no. 165, pp. 241–249.

*Sciences* (IWAAISS) because they supported the production and preservation of art. Murray and Fagg, to the best of their knowledge, employed local ideology in creating building typology that fits every region for their museum and sourced ways of keeping the institutions afloat despite meagre funding. Traditional building elements like courtyard was also utilised in Lagos Museum which was a modern construction. Though only viewed from the inside, it provided a similar feeling to the compound housing typology associated to many ethnic groups within Nigeria.

### Nigerian Museums and Decolonisation

Decolonisation in recent times have become an ever-present part of museum debates and an increasing aspect of museum action plan.<sup>65</sup> As a result, museums internationally have committed to engage in a reflection on their role and responsibility as they pertain to colonialism.<sup>66</sup> Their role in how cultures were represented from the perspective of the west in favour of the colonial ideology has continued to be questioned. Consequently, cultures and people being represented want to be identified by their own histories that contributes to the formation of a collective identity. Thus, encouraging answers about ownership, power and control to emerge. Further addressing diversity between cultures as against a homogenous perspective of the world.<sup>67</sup> The need to decolonise Nigerian museums cannot be over emphasised to

65 GIBLIN, John, Imma RAMOS and Nikky GROUT. Dismantling the master's house: thoughts on representing empire and decolonising museums and public spaces in practice an introduction. *Third Text*, 2019, vol. 33, no. 4–5, pp. 471–486.

66 BERGERON, Yves and Michèle RIVET. Introduction. Decolonising museology or “re-formulating museology”. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 2021, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 15–28.

67 Ibidem.



Fig. 4: Osun Osogbo groove as an example of a decolonised indigenous museum without wall. Source: Oluwatoyin Sogbesan Collection, 2022.

acknowledge and highlight the diverse indigenous cultures in existence before the arrival of Europeans. Such acknowledgement implies inclusion of indigenous guidelines regarding modes of representation of their material culture. With visitor numbers constantly decreasing to school groups, Nigerian museums need to find ways of encouraging inclusion that will likely kickstart the process of decolonisation. Potential visitors need to see themselves as stakeholders to contribute to the emancipation process.

The quest for decolonization has also become even more important with the call to return works of art to their original communities.<sup>68</sup> Artefacts such as the looted bronzes from Benin Kingdom in Nigeria have become part of the wider debate of items being returned to their country of origin. Their

return questions what role Nigeria museum will play in adding breadth, depth and possibly new knowledge to the canon. How will they reinsert these collections back to the community? The call for restitution should however have a wider implication beyond just the return of the objects but to highlight the need for new indigenous museum where artefacts embrace local representational guidelines that encourage inclusion. Such inclusion will not only question colonial interpretation but contribute to how sacred objects are treated to respect the culture responsible for their production. Thus, moving away from seeing the world as a homogeneous society and encouraging indigenous language as communication tool within Nigerian museums. To this end, museums in Nigeria will do well to adopt indigenous familiar models (home/shrine/palace) recognisable to the people they seek to serve (figure 4).

68 SARR, Felwine and Bénédicte SAVOY. *The restitution of African cultural heritage. Toward a new relational ethics* [online]. November 2018 [accessed 2022-08-17]. Available from [www: <http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf>](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf). Report.



## Nigerian Museum in Postcolonial Era

Today, Nigerian museums are within the purview of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). This responsibility is vested in it by the Decree 77 of 1979, now an Act of the Parliament, CAP 242, of 1990. Continuing from the Federal Department of Antiquities, the Commission is responsible for establishing and approving museums. It can withdraw such approval for security reasons if such establishment ceases to be a suitable repository for the valuable specimen.<sup>69</sup> There are over 52 public museums and 38 state, privately owned and university museums that include historical and world heritage sites under the control of the Commission. The Commission's mission is to systematically collect, preserve, study, and interpret the material evidence (tangible and intangible) of the people of Nigeria and in the Diaspora.<sup>70</sup> To remain relevant in contemporary Nigeria, the Commission was actively involved in services to the community through inclusive educational programmes such as teaching arts and crafts and other skill acquisition programmes for prisons, schools and communities. Nevertheless, the museum commission still operates a museum in line with the initially instituted British colonial model. Colonial English language dominates the exhibitions instead of the country's indigenous languages. Sadly, museum visits and interactions has reduced drastically coupled with changes in opening times, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day of the year to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

<sup>69</sup> FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 148–124.

<sup>70</sup> National Commission for Museum and Monuments Annual Report 2012. Abuja, Lagos: NCMM, 2012.

before the world pandemic of 2020.<sup>71</sup>

All of the museums in Nigeria were established under different conditions with their dilemma and support needs.<sup>72</sup> Hence, aside from general funding needs, they all have specific needs and limitations. Each museum was set up around specific collections and locations but has yet to devise new models of education, engagement and inclusion. Hence, Nigerian museums are yet to understand their role in contemporary Africa and make the institution more inclusive and welcoming for the citizenry. Religiosity has become the order of the day in Nigeria, affecting the interpretative aspect of museums. As a result, the interpretation department will require retraining to unlearn the old methodology and learn new innovative techniques to engage the public about the implications and meanings of the artefacts within their collection. Thus, it serves as a way of initial measures to ameliorate the concerns of the indigenous people whose ancestral artefacts were collected for a colonial museum.

The deplorable state of some of these colonial institutions in Nigeria today highlights the dearth of value for culture and heritage. As a result, funds are not allocated for their maintenance, and day-to-day running becomes a challenge to curators and other museum management officials. Though the museums try encouraging inclusive social programming, they still seem far behind their counterparts

<sup>71</sup> FAGG, Bernard. The museums of Nigeria. *Museum International*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 124–148; CHOI, Byungjin and Junic KIM. Changes and challenges in museum management after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 2021, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 148 et seq.

<sup>72</sup> HELLMAN, Amanda H. The Grounds for Museological Experiments: Developing the Colonial Museum Project in British Nigeria. *Journal of curatorial studies*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 74–96.

worldwide on decolonising as they face other day-to-day running essentials. For instance, public museums like the *Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture* (MOTNA) in Jos need attention. In line with the founding fathers Kenneth Murray and Bernard Fagg, inclusive participation of the indigenous people whose cultures are represented would be beneficial in restoring the building typologies on exhibition. Nevertheless, until Nigerian museums becomes decolonised, taking the centre stage and responsibility of becoming an inclusive space for the indigenous people will continue to be a challenge.

## Conclusion

Museums are understood to be places that could facilitate citizens' understanding and stimulate development through public outreach. An ideology of museums that was successful in Britain and through institutions like the British Museum led to the establishment of museums in colonies like Nigeria. The British colonial administration established museums in Nigeria mainly to restrict a constant flow of artefacts from leaving the shores of Nigeria. As a colonial construct, it was also considered a space for collecting, preserving and exhibiting the diversity of Nigeria. However, such exhibitions were not to the benefit of Nigerians at the time but that of the colonial expatriates. Thus, it became a space for the exhibition of wealth, power, authority and interpretation of the colonies from a European perspective formed out of the collections of Kenneth Murray and Bernard Fagg.

The colonial ideology of museums was impertinent as it disregarded the culture of the people whose ancestral artefacts were collected in all sorts of

manners to populate the foreign institution. As Nigeria's diverse population grows and changes over time, modification within the museum setting and exhibition is also imperative. However, the colonial model, structure and language of representation are presently still in use. Thus, negating the indigenous ideology of museums within Nigeria and the three official languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). As museums internationally continue to call for decolonisation, Nigerian institutions are yet to readdress and retrace their steps to accommodate a new inclusive ideology. Consequently, for museums to be perceived as part of Nigerian construct and culture decolonisation on all levels need to take place. At present, Nigerian museums are a colonial construct that have evolved into neo-colonial institutions.

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## STUDIE/ARTICLES

TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONCEPT "MUSEUM" IN THE UKRAINIAN SPACE<sup>1</sup><https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2022-1-3>

SVITLANA MURAVSKA

## ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

After the conference in Japan in 2019, museum communities of different countries discussed the transformation of the concept of "museum" and the need to change the existing definition. The article attempts to outline how the idea of "museum" was transformed among Ukrainian museum workers from the end of the 19th century till now. At this time, active museum life unfolded on Ukrainian lands, and activists sought to outline the museum's mission. The idea of this concept was modified given the change in the political situation. Special requirements for the museum as a tool of propaganda existed within the framework of the Soviet socio-political system. After Ukraine declared independence, theorists and practitioners of the museum business primarily evaluated the museum as an institution of social memory, indicating this direction's importance for Ukrainian civil society.

As an official representative of the Ukrainian museum community, the Presidium of the ICOM of Ukraine draws attention to the need to preserve the existing concept's critical characteristic

against the current debate's background. At the same time, ICOM Ukraine warned that purely formal compliance with functional criteria does not prevent the transformation of museums into a tool of propaganda. Russia's cynical war against Ukraine in 2022 demonstrates that this is what must avoid at all costs.

#### Proměna koncepce muzea v ukrajinském prostoru

Od konference konané v Japonsku v roce 2019 se mezi zástupci muzejní obce v různých zemích diskutuje o transformaci koncepce muzea a potřebě změny stávající definice. Článek se pokouší nastínit, jak se měnilo pojetí muzea v představách ukrajinských muzejních pracovníků od konce 19. století až do současnosti. V této době se na Ukrajině rozvíjel čilý muzejní život a jeho organizátoři se snažili definovat poslání muzeí. Hlavní myšlenka tohoto konceptu byla modifikována s ohledem na změnu politické situace. V rámci sovětského společensko-politického systému existovaly zvláštní požadavky na muzeum jako nástroj propagandy. Od vyhlášení nezávislosti Ukrajiny je muzeum v teoretické i praktické sféře považováno primárně za instituci společenské paměti, což naznačuje velký význam tohoto zaměření pro ukrajinskou občanskou společnost.

Předsednictvo Ukrajinského výboru ICOM jako oficiální zástupce ukrajinské muzejní obce upozorňuje

na potřebu zachovat hlavní prvky stávající koncepce na pozadí současné situace. ICOM Ukrajina zároveň upozornil, že čistě formální dodržování funkčních kritérií nezabrání transformaci muzeí v nástroj propagandy. Cynická válka Ruska proti Ukrajině v roce 2022 ukazuje, že právě tomu je třeba se za každou cenu vyhnout.

#### KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

*museum – discussion – concept – social memory*  
*muzeum – diskuse – koncepce – společenská paměť*

#### 1. Evolution of the concept "museum" in pre-soviet time

The history of the development of museum affairs in Ukraine traces its roots back to the traditions of princely collecting, which emerged back to the times of Kyiv' Rus'. These traditions were continued in collections of icons, decorative and applied arts, and portraits, which representatives of the Cossack nobility collected during the 17th and 18th centuries. The historiography supports the idea the first museum on Ukrainian lands was the cabinet of rarities at the Black Sea Hydrographical Depot in Mykolayiv. It was engaged in the sea coast's cartography and had its museum, founded in 1803. However, there are reasons to consider that the first museum on this land was the mathematical and

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements: I am so grateful to Natalie Dziubenko, Ruslana Man'kovska, Roman Czmelyk, Fedir Androshchuk and Iryna Diachuk for the consent to take part in the interview. Special thanks to the ICOM Ukraine Presidium, in particular to Kateryna Chuyeva and Anastasia Cherednychenko, for support in preparing the paper.

physical cabinet of Lviv University, dated 1744.<sup>2</sup>

In the Enlightenment era, people were encouraged to collect art. It also led to the founding of museums in Ukrainian lands. They were part of the Russian and Austrian empires in the 19th century – the first attempts to define the concept “museum” date back to that period. Traditionally, people who were actively involved in the activities of museum institutions and signified their activities formulated these sentences.

The museologists Mykola Biliashivskyi, Fedir Ernst, Fedir Shmidt, and Ilarion Swientsitski formulated the basics of museum affairs. They contributed to the museum's development on Ukrainian lands. Mykola Biliashivskyi was the most renowned among museum professionals in the late 19th to the first quarter of the 20th century, organizing immense heritage protection activity. He supported the establishment of museums in Poltava, Chernigiv, the development of the museums in Kherson, Zhytomyr, and Horodok, Rivne region. He was the head of the Kyiv Art and Industrial Museum, one of the most prominent museums in Ukraine. According to Bilyashivsky's program, the museum should have a purely scientific character. He wrote the museum's collection should contain only objects whose exact origin is known. Bilashivsky considered *“the museum work is to preserve and research all the cultural achievements of the humankind. So that they would be a living and intangible source of inspiration for their creativity, and not lie as the dead museum objects in the*

*state storerooms”*.<sup>3</sup> At the previous meeting of museum staff in Moscow in 1912, M. Bilyashivsky spoke about the essence of the museum. He formulated this problem by defining museum tasks. He also proposed to continue discussing at the next meeting *“... whether museums should be developed only for scientists or whether they should also have national and cultural tasks to educate the wider community?”*<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Modification of the concept of “museum” in the times of the USSR

After establishing the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the USSR, museums were not immediately transformed into an instrument of ideological influence on the public. Till 1928, when the decree of the All-Union Central Executive Committee “On Museum Construction” was declared, museums continued to fulfill their mission to preserve, research, and display cultural heritage.

Museum theorist and practitioner Fedir Shmidt argued there are three main categories of museums – academic, educational, and public. They have different principles for organizing their activities and work for different audiences. In his opinion, public museums are places for informed strolls and mental relaxation, where people can cultivate higher abilities. It makes people human, and it also is a source of impurity.<sup>5</sup>

Another museum figure of the interwar period, Volodymyr Dubrovsky, who for some time was the head inspector of museums

and the preservation of cultural monuments activity in Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, wrote: *“Collecting and preserving natural and cultural artifacts [...] is the first and most important step towards the dissemination of knowledge among the general public and thereby to the improvement of public morale. A museum is a cultural and educational institution that collects, conserves, learns, and exhibits for general viewing natural and cultural artifacts.”*<sup>6</sup> This formulation is very much in harmony with the modern definition of the concept “museum”. So, in this formulation one hundred years ago, there is the idea that museums work to improve public well-being.

On the western Ukrainian lands, scientific discourse developed in a different direction, referring to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Poland in the interwar period. The well-known museum figure on these territories, Ilarion Swientsitski, was inspired by the ideas declared on Museum Journal papers at the beginning of the 20th century. He stated the primary purpose of the museum is to serve the community. Instead, his definition of a museum was very philosophical: *“the museum is a treasure trove of national creativity linked to the world or an image of the world lifestyle. In the first instance, the museum serves the art for deepening and spreading a sense of beauty. [...] In the second case, the museum educates the visitor about the outside diversity of life and its internal uniformity through collections”*.<sup>7</sup>

6 DUBROVSKYI, Volodymyr. *Muzei na Ukraini* [online]. Kharkiv, 1929, p. 4 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from [www: <https://elib.nlu.org.ua/object.html?id=532>](http://www.elib.nlu.org.ua/object.html?id=532).

7 SVIENTSITSKYI, Ilarion. *Pro muzei i muzeinytstvo: narysy i zamitky* [online]. Lviv, 1920, p. 8 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from [http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/ua/elib.exe?Z21ID=&I21DBN=UKRLIB&P21DBN=UKRLIB&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=online\\_book&C21COM=&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=FF=&S21STR=00004392](http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/ua/elib.exe?Z21ID=&I21DBN=UKRLIB&P21DBN=UKRLIB&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=online_book&C21COM=&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=FF=&S21STR=00004392).

2 MURAVSKA, Svitlana. *Muzejni zaklady u sy'stemi vy'shhoi osvity: Zaxidnoyi Ukrainy na tli svitovy'x tendencij*. Lviv: Tsentr pam'yatkoznavstva NAN Ukraini i UTOPIK, 2018, p. 64.

3 DIDUKH, Liudmyla. Mykola Biliashivskyi i rozvytok mistsevykh muzeiv v Ukraini. *Kraieznavstvo*, 2008, no. 1-4, p. 123.

4 Ibidem, p. 124.

5 SHMIDT, Fedor. *Istoricheskie, ehtnograficheskie, khudozhestvennye muzei: Ocherk istorii i teorii muzejnogo dela* [online]. Khar'kov, 1919, p. 38 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from [www: <https://elib.nlu.org.ua/view.html?id=726>](http://www.elib.nlu.org.ua/view.html?id=726).

In the 30's of the 20th century, the requirements of public authorities for museums have changed in the Soviet Union. This institution must represent the benefits of socialism in all spheres of life. Their most important task became propaganda.<sup>8</sup> After the Second World War till the epoch of "thaw", the museum activity was ideologized in the Soviet Union. From the mid-1950s, museology issues began to study in the scientific department of museology at the USSR Historical Museum and the Department of Archeology and Museology at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv State University. In 1955 Professor Halyna Mezentsseva established the Kyiv Museum Center.<sup>9</sup> The year of creation is not accidental because, in 1955, the first Soviet textbook on museum studies was published. Their authors were the Research Institute of Local Lore and Museum Work team. It was the foremost institution in the USSR, dealing with museum affairs and cultural heritage protection. Later the textbook survived several editions. The analysis of changes demonstrates the transformation of museum studies as a science in the USSR, critical concepts in its structure, tasks, in particular under the influence of J. Neustupný's and Z. Stránský's ideas.<sup>10</sup>

In her textbook, G. Mezentsseva reiterates the Soviet historiography idea that museums are research and cultural-educational institutions.

They collect, assemble, study monuments of the history of material and spiritual culture of humankind, natural-ethnographic and, memorial and other collections. The museums organize work through exhibitions, exhibitions, excursions, lectures, and different scientific and educational activities. They disseminate natural-scientific and socio-political knowledge in such way. Given the socio-political requirements, the researcher points out that museums help shape the Marxist-Leninist worldview and carry out the communist education of workers.<sup>11</sup> This statement echoes the characteristics of the concept given in the mentioned textbook in 1955.<sup>12</sup>

Yurii Omelchenko, a pupil, and later colleague of G. Mezentsseva, was one of the most famous Ukrainian museum researcher of postwar times. He continued his activities already in independent Ukraine. Omelchenko saw the museum as an institution that emerged as a means of conscious and purposeful attraction of people to the cultural heritage of past times.<sup>13</sup> The researcher's scientific heritage is rich in exciting ideas about the theory of museum work. For example, he presented an original concept, according to which museology is a three-level system of inheritance of historical and cultural values based on a museum object.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Y. Omelchenko proposed a definition of "museum"

that largely overlapped with the then-existing Soviet museology statement. In particular, he wrote, "*modern museology defines museums as research, cultural-educational and political-educational institutions, which compile, store, study, exhibit, popularize monuments of material and spiritual culture, natural-historical collections*".<sup>15</sup> This wording is in tune with the description of the concept of "museum" in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account the ideologization of the public sphere in Soviet times, it is not strange that Omelchenko singled out the function of documentation and the educational function, quoting the words from the publication about the ideological-educational work at the museum.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. "Museum" in independent Ukraine

After the collapse of the USSR and the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, the social circumstances of the museum activity have radically changed. It inevitably reflected on the new formulation of museum theory. The Law of Ukraine "On Museums and Museum Affairs" was adopted in 1995. The first article of this Law defined museums as "*cultural, educational and research institutions assigned to study, preserve and use monuments of nature, material, and spiritual culture, involvement of citizens to the achievements of national and world-historical and cultural heritage*".<sup>18</sup> The main

8 MANKOVSKA, Ruslana. *Muzeina sprava v Ukraini: teoretychni, praktychni ta antropologichni vymiry istorychnoho dosvidu (1920-ti rr. – pochatok XXI st.)*. Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi: Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi derzhavnyi pedahohichnyi universytet imeni Hryhoriia Skovorody, 2017, p. 138. Dysertatsiia na здобuttia naukovooho stupenia doktora istorychnykh nauk.

9 Ibidem, p. 139.

10 ANAN'EV, Vitalij. Rossijskaya muzeologiya vtoroj poloviny KHKH v.: paradigmy, napravleniya i struktury sovetskogo perioda razvitiya. *Vesnik Belaruskaga dzyarzhavnaga universiteta kul'tury i mastactv*, 2016, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 222.

11 MEZENTSEVA, Halyna. *Muzeieznastvo (na materialakh muzeiv URSR)*. Kyiv: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1980, p. 6.

12 *Osnovy sovetskogo muzevedeniya*. Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo kulturno-prosvetitel'noy literatury, 1955, p. 11.

13 OMELCHENKO, Yurij and Larysa DANYLOVA. Druha pidsystema muzeinytstva (istoriia, teoriia, praktyka). *Vita Antiqua* [online]. 1999, no. 2, p. 251 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<http://vitaantiqua.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/30VA2omelchenko.pdf>>.

14 Ibidem, p. 251–257.

15 OMELCHENKO, Yurij. *Rozvytok uchbovykh muzeiv*. Kyiv, 1988, p. 4.

16 Muzei. In *Bol'shaya sovetskaya ehnciklopediya* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<http://bse.sci-lib.com/article078848.html>>.

17 *Kratkij slovar' muzejnykh terminov*. In *Muzej i pamyatniki kul'tury v idejno-vospitatel'noj rabote na sovremennom etape: sb. nauch. tr. / PII kul'tury*, vol. 126. Moskva, 1983, p. 126.

18 Pro muzei ta muzeinu spravu: Zakon Ukrainy vid 29 chervnia 1995 r. In *Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy* [online]. 1995, no. 25 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<http://www.>>



museum tasks were also declared cultural, educational, and research activities, acquisition of collections, exhibition, fund, publishing, restoration, and monument protection activity.

In the 1990s and 2000s, not only in Kyiv, the universities in Kharkiv, Lutsk, Rivne, and later in Lviv began to teach the museum staff. The need for professional literature on the museum theory has become relevant. It has led to the emergence of a number of textbooks and appropriate formulations of basic concepts. In 2006, archaeologist Volodymyr Yakobovsky from Ivan Ogiienko Kamenets-Podolsky National University published a manual. On author's opinion the main functions of the museum were the scientific documentation of natural phenomena and processes of society, cultural heritage protection, research and creating worldview of society members.<sup>19</sup> Victoriia Shevchenko and Iryna Lomachynska defined the "museum" as a *"historically determined multifunctional institution of social memory, through which the public realized their need to select, preserve and represent a specific group of natural and cultural objects perceived by society as a value that should be removal from the environment and transmit from generation to generation"*.<sup>20</sup> Dmytro Kepin noted this definition is similar to the term proposed by Mariia Kaulen and Evgenij Mavleyev in *Russian Museum Encyclopedia*.<sup>21</sup>

zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/249/95-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>.

19 IAKUBOVSKYI, Volodymyr. *Muzeieznavstvo: navchalnyi posibnyk-praktykum*. Kamianets-Podilskyi: PP Moshak, 2006, pp. 272–275.

20 SHEVCHENKO, Viktoriia and Iryna LOMACHYNSKA. *Muzeieznavstvo: navchalnyi posibnyk*. Kyiv, 2007, p. 148.

21 KEPIN, Dmytro. *Navchalni vydannia z muzeolohii v Ukraini: krytychnyi analiz. Nizhynska starovyna: zbirnyk rehionalnoi istorii ta pamiatkoznavstva*, 2010, vol. 13, no. 10, p. 175;

The director of the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine O. Mikhno in *Encyclopedia of Education*, the authors of *Sociology of the Museum*, Alla Kyridon, Oksana Salata in the training manual for students-historians *Basic of Museum Studies* also proposed similar definition.<sup>22</sup> In 2008 Lviv researchers Mychailo Rutynsky and Olga Stetsiuk declare that museums are focused on work also with *"monuments of spiritual culture"*, using the term from the text of the Law *On Museums and Museum Affairs*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, an analysis of textbooks published in Ukraine after 2000 on museum basics shows the researchers position the museum primarily as an institution of social memory.

In 2010, the National Institute for Strategic Studies prepared an analytical note about perspectives of museum activities. It was based on the analysis of the experience of foreign museums and indicated that museums are becoming important centers of education and training. It has also emphasized the ability of Ukrainian museums to provide interactive, subject and ideological platforms for deeper identity, nation and the world.<sup>24</sup>

KAULEN, Mariya and Evgenij MAVLEEY. *Muzej. In Rossijskaya muzejnaya ehnciklopediya*. Moskva: Progress, 2005, p. 395.

22 KYRYDON, Alla. *Muzei yak instytutysii pamiaty. Ukraina – Yevropa – Svit. Seriia: Istoriia, mizhnarodni vidnosyny* [online]. 2015, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 193 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <[http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Ues\\_2015\\_16%281%29\\_23](http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Ues_2015_16%281%29_23)>; MIKHNO, Oleksandr. *Muzei. In Entsyklopediia osvity* [online]. 2021 [accessed 2022-01-28] Available from www: <<https://lib.iitta.gov.ua/729368/>>; SALATA, Oksana. *Osnovy muzeieznavstva: navchalno-metodychnyi posibnyk*. Vinnytsia: TOV «Nilan-LTD», 2015, pp. 64–65; CARPOV, Victor (ed.). *Sotsiolohiia muzeiu: prezentatsiia na tli prostoru i chasu*. Kyiv, 2016. 168 p.

23 RUTYNSKYI, Mykhailo and Olha STETSIUK. *Muzeieznavstvo: navchalnyi posibnyk*. Kyiv, 2008, p. 9.

24 *Rol muzeiv u kulturnomu ta sotsialno-ekonomichnomu rozvytku krainy: zarubizhnyi dosvid. Analitichna zapyska Natsionalnoho instytutu stratehichnykh doslidzhen* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarny-rozvytok/rol-muzeiv-u-kulturnomu-ta-sotsialno-ekonomichnomu-rozvytku>>.

In March 2013, the then president of the International Council of Museums Hans Martin Hinz, gave a lecture in Kyiv entitled *Challenges and Opportunities. Museums in a global world*. He stressed the role of museums as places of reconciliation, in which, at the same time, people do not try to harmonize history.<sup>25</sup> After the 2013–2014 and the military conflict in eastern Ukraine, the discussion on such museum role gained another round of relevance. In particular, Polina Verbytska researched the potential of the historical museum in overcoming the conflict of historical memory, which destabilizes modern Ukrainian society.<sup>26</sup>

The strengthening of such museum mission has connected with the reset of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory due to the country's socio-political situation. If the normative documents of 2006–2013, which determined the directions of the Institute's work, don't mention the word "museum". After 2014 it is already indicated that the Institute *"promotes the formation of museum and library funds for restoration and preservation of Ukrainian people national memory, preparation of museum expositions and educational programs"*.<sup>27</sup>

Oksana Bondarets is one of the most authoritative Ukrainian

25 KHINTS, Hans Martin. *Muzei – tse instytut pryvremnia suspilstva. In Istorychna pravda: informatsiinyi resurs* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/514a3df8d8f1f/>>.

26 See VERBYTSKA, Polina. *Istorychni muzei yak chynnyk pryvremnia ta suspilnoho dialohu. Historical and Cultural Studies*, 2014, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 13–17.

27 *Deiaki pytannia Ukrainskoho instytutu natsionalnoi pamiaty: Postanova Kabinetu Ministriv Ukrainy vid 12 lystopada 2014 zi zminamy, vnesenymy zghidno postanovy Kabinetu Ministriv Ukrainy № 799 vid 3. 10. 2018 r., № 885 vid 16. 10. 2019, № 561 vid 01. 07. 2020* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-28] Available from www: <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/684-2014-%D0%BF#Text>>.



researchers who conceptually studied modifying the concept of “museum”. She emphasized the importance of the museum as a symbol for a new perception of Ukrainian history and culture in general, as museum objects transmit a particular cultural code of the nation. The researcher believes the museums have a significant potential to restore national memory. *“Today, museums as institutions of memory rethink their mission and tasks, taking into account the analysis of the environment [...] where they work, as well as the special nature of the museum space as such one, the diversity of the museum world and other factors. [...] These are just some of the tasks of modern Ukrainian museum – the new approaches to building a narrative by museum means, the work with the traumatic past, using the experience of ‘complicated history’ in museums around the world, spreading knowledge about the free from myths and stereotypes history of Ukraine.”*<sup>28</sup>

The *Ukrainian Encyclopedia of History* defines museums as institutions of memory next to archives, libraries, and cultural-historical preserves. Author considers these institutions bring the past up to date and preserve the historical sources for cultural reproduction. They see museums are seen as tools for preservation memory, communicators/mediators, bearers, places and the toposes of memory. To their minds, the museum can also be an information center of cultural heritage, an institute for socio-cultural adaptation, a tool to recognize cultural values of past epochs and modernity and interpret their

meanings for self-recognition and self-identification.<sup>29</sup>

According to culturalist Serhiy Rudenko, the optimal socio-cultural purpose of the museum is based on the symbiosis of science and art in curatorial work. In his doctoral dissertation, the researcher argues the museum's task is

- *“to accumulate socio-cultural experience (in the form of monuments that reflect the effects of spontaneous socio-cultural experiment and purposeful socio-cultural engineering);*
- *to make a socio-cultural design (verified data in museum-certified meetings);*
- *preliminary to test innovative socio-cultural technologies (integrated into the content of museum representations);*
- *to fix feedback on the results of socio-cultural innovations (synchronous museification as a factor of element-by-element socio-cultural engineering)”*.<sup>30</sup>

The researcher considers due to this spontaneous socio-cultural experiment becomes controlled.

#### 4. Discussion on “Kyoto” definition

Just before the conference in Japan, the popular magazine *Ukrainian Week* has published Yuri Jerzy Onuch's exciting column. The curator and contemporary artist of Polish descent have associated with Ukraine for more than ten years of professional activity. His philosophical statements have foreshadowed a discussion later unfolded in Kyoto: *“And what was wrong with the previous definition? [...] Committees of experts have been working on descriptions for years, but it is difficult to see the benefits of their work. Not even worth mentioning the aesthetic beauty of the definition, if only recognize that it is in ‘planetary well-being’, whatever those words mean. I offer another profound to the committees rethinking what a museum is, as well as to those trying to understand what modern art is for modern societies a simple idea: ‘The dragon is hard to overcome, but you have to try’ and ‘The horse is as everyone sees it’. Well, except they doesn't want to see... because doesn't have the courage”*.<sup>31</sup>

After an active discussion of the concept of “museum” at the ICOM International Conference in Kyoto, in Ukraine, there was not a separate special scientific event – meeting at the national level. However, based on the results of the member's survey and professional talking, the ICOM Ukraine Presidium formulated its recommendations for the “Committee Day”, organized by ICOM France together with ICOM Europe and ICOM Germany, as well as the Committee on Museology (ICOFORM) on March 10, 2020.

29 DUBROVINA, Liubov, Alla KYRYDON and Iryna MATIASH. *Instytutu pamiati: arkhiv, biblioteka, muzei ta kulturno-istorychni zapovidnyky*. In SMOLII, Valerii (ed.). *Entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy: Ukraina–Ukrainci*, knyha 2 [online]. Kyiv, 2019 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <[http://resource.history.org.ua/cgi-bin/eiu/history.exe?Z21ID=&I21DBN=EIU&P21DBN=EIU&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=eiu\\_all&C21COM=S&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=TRN=&S21COLORTERMS=0&S21STR=2.23](http://resource.history.org.ua/cgi-bin/eiu/history.exe?Z21ID=&I21DBN=EIU&P21DBN=EIU&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=eiu_all&C21COM=S&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=TRN=&S21COLORTERMS=0&S21STR=2.23)>.

30 RUDENKO, Serhii. *Sotsiokulturne pryznachennia ta instytutsiina spetsyfika muzeiu* [online]. Kyiv, 2021, pp. 432–433 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <[http://knukim.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rudenko\\_Diss\\_KNUKIM\\_Druk.pdf](http://knukim.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rudenko_Diss_KNUKIM_Druk.pdf)>. Dysertatsiia na zdobuttia naukovoho stupenia doktora kulturolohii za spetsialnistiu 26.00.01 “Teoriia ta istoriia kultury”.

31 ONUKH, Yezhy. *Vyznachennia. Ukrainskyi tyzhden* [online]. 29. 08. 2019, vol. 615, no. 35 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <[https://tyzhden.ua/Columns/50/234509?fbclid=IwAR3nBzaG9riw4d\\_pJACetSF3anxPKICACZPr88oan-xWoNDWW3TezgrZQ](https://tyzhden.ua/Columns/50/234509?fbclid=IwAR3nBzaG9riw4d_pJACetSF3anxPKICACZPr88oan-xWoNDWW3TezgrZQ)>.

28 BONDARETS, Oksana. *Muzei: zberezhenia spadshchyny, osmyslennia mynulo, formuvannia identychnosti. Naukovi zapysky NaUKMA. Istoriia i teoriia kultury*, 2021, no. 4, p. 110.

The written proposals from the Presidium of the Ukrainian ICOM proposed to leave the main characteristics/functions of museums in the existing concept, because they are the cornerstone for Ukrainian museums. In addition, this document emphasised on necessity to divide clearly museums and other type of institutions, which use the word “museum” in their title but their activities do not correspond with the museum definition and *Code of Ethics*. The ICOM Ukraine also drew attention to the following things. *“Taking into account the experience of totalitarian and post-totalitarian past of our country, we should warn that only formal compliance with functional criteria does not prevent museums from being transformed into the propaganda’s instrument of totalitarian and anti-human regimes. That is why it is important to provide a definition not only with a basic core, but also with a layer, in addition to the functional signs, that would express the essential landmarks and the values for which a museum should serves in a free and democratic society.”*<sup>32</sup>

## 5. The interviews

As the paper task also is to highlight the unique positions of Ukrainian museum staff on the current concept “museum”, I have planned that one of the stages for the empirical collecting material would be a survey of directors of national museums in Ukraine (twenty persons) and the most well-known museum theorists. By correspondence during October–November 2021, I have asked participants to answer the following question: **Do you think that the new definition of**

**the ICOM Museum, announced at the General Conference in Kyoto on September 7, 2019, is consistent with changes in the circumstances of the functioning of museums in the modern world and outlines their significance?**

I have proposed to express an attitude to the concept as a whole and its separate parts and offer one’s definition if it was. I was inspired by the famous Polish researcher Dorota Folga-Januszewska’s methodology.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted I have received few answers, based on which it isn’t easy to make a qualitative comparative analysis. At the same time, the received answers of leading Ukrainian museum figures are essential to understand how this issue is also articulated in the Ukrainian museum space.

**Ruslana Mankovska**, Doctor in History, a leading researcher at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences, researcher of Ukrainian museums, monuments and local lore. She has been researching the theory and practice of museum affairs for more than 30 years.

Because of transformation the museum in the XXth century – at the beginning of the XXI century, its basis should remain a museum object – a rarity, relic, original [...] The museum specifics are in the presence of artifacts. [...] It is also important to emphasize the modern museum is an alive social organism. As we see, it can respond to challenges: information technologies, pandemics, etc. It becomes an intellectual, social tool that affects the individual and shapes his consciousness, moral and ethical values (human function). Therefore, I would add to all

visions – a modern museum forms public consciousness!<sup>34</sup>

**Natalie Dziubenko**, researcher of natural museology, director of the Lviv’s State Natural History Museum of the National Academy of Sciences, an active participant in ICOM NATHIST (International Committee of Natural Museums ICOM).

1. Several participants in the discussion<sup>35</sup> from different countries expressed a fair fear the new definition will to the fact that in those countries where there is domestic “museum legislation”, the new definition of ICOM will be very different from the existing legal one. It is impossible to use in the law. The museum can be called anything according to the new definition. It does not reflect the unique features of the museum and indefinitely expands the list of institutions that can self-identify as museums.

2. The new definition is a very relativistic one. It does not provide for the responsibility of museums for “academic” science-based presentation of both collections and research results.

3. Too many words. The new definition uses many phrases and fixed expressions that are very broad but meaningless. The first part, “Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures” – more like a mission or a vision than a definition. References about the past and the future are very vague and unclear. It is also unclear how museums will be able

<sup>32</sup> What definition do museums need? *Proceedings of the ICOM Committees’ day* [online]. Paris: Grande galerie de l’évolution (MNHN), March 10, 2020 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from [www: <https://www.icom-ce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Whatdefinition-Proceedings-ICOM-France.pdf>](https://www.icom-ce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Whatdefinition-Proceedings-ICOM-France.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> See FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, Dorota. Dzieje pojęcia muzeum i problemy współczesne. Wprowadzenie do dyskusji nad nową definicją muzeum. *Muzealnictwo*, 2020, vol. 61, pp. 27–45.

<sup>34</sup> MAN’KOVSKA, Ruslana. E-mail to the author, 30. 11. 2021.

<sup>35</sup> In the framework of the joint conference SPNHC (Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections) and ICOM NATHIST (International Committee of Natural Museums ISOM, June, 2020.

to ensure equal rights and equal access for all people to heritage. In general, the whole first paragraph of the definition is very broad, politicized, and unrealistic to implement. It is quite suitable as a core for formulating a vision/mission. In short, [...] it seems [...] the old definition from 2007 was quite good and can add about the cultural role of museums for communities and generations, and that will be enough. If we take into account all the related processes that affect the holders of collections today – decolonization, repatriation, Nagoya Protocol [...] It is hardly possible to give a single answer to the question “What is a museum?”, which would reflect all the processes taking place in the world and was suitable for legal documents.<sup>36</sup>

**Roman Chmelyk**, Doctor in History, Director of the Lviv National Historical Museum, Vice President of ICOM Ukraine.

The definition of museums is quite voluminous and capacious. [The authors] tried to reflect both the traditional understanding of the museum, as an institution that collects, preserves, researches, and promotes, and to respond to today's challenges of equal access for all groups of society as in the sense of social equality and according to the people with disabilities. From this point of view, its editing could deprive the museum of some critical components. At the same time, there is a feeling you read not a scientific definition of a term, but a populist slogan of some ideological platform, especially in “establishing social justice, global equality, and planetary prosperity”. It generally sounds like a utopian one. It isn't easy

to imagine how museums could do this. The museum activities are a priori aimed at raising the cultural and educational level of visitors or society in general and establishing better communication both within it and between different ethnic, religious, and political communities. In this sense, museums should be platforms for dialogue. The interpretation function, which each government wants to use as an instrument to achieve its politically determined goals, is also a caveat.<sup>37</sup>

**Iryna Dyachuk**, director of The Sergiy Korolyov National Astronautics Museum.

The topic [of the museum definition] is a very important one, especially for classical museums, which, unfortunately, in our time, renewing, lose their primary function – the preservation and transmission of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. [...] Today, museum specialists devote a lot of time to developing and implementing new forms of work with visitors, expanding paid services, introducing interactive methods, and more. All these things are important ones, but the basis of the museum is an authentic collection. This fact distinguishes it from other elements in the structure of culture. Nowadays, scientific and educational centers, cultural environments, and art spaces are often under the sign “Museum”. [...] Without diminishing the importance of such structures, I would like to emphasize they are not content-wise museums, although they perform similar functions in the socio-cultural information system.

The definition [proposed in Kyoto] considers the museum's specific features, emphasizing its non-profit

and ideological orientation. I would increase the emphasis on the axiological function of the museum, which allows to accumulate and broadcast humanity cultural experience through the scientific acquisition of funds and the modern methods of museum collection visualization.<sup>38</sup>

**Fedir Androschuk**, Ukrainian archaeologist, Doctor in History, General Director of the National Museum of History of Ukraine.

The definition [proposed in Kyoto] can be accepted, except that “museums are not for profit”. In Ukraine, the state makes financial support for museums in the following areas – wages, energy consumption, and security. Services for the latter are growing, and the budget amount remains the same and is not indexed. [...] This fact means the rest [money] the museums have to pay from their special accounts and forget about other essential things – updating the material base, capital expenditures, etc. In addition, some museums have debts due to court decisions, which must pay. Our museum has not received funds for capital expenditures for about ten years. Therefore, for a museum to function fully, it must earn money by selling services.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

Thus such well-known Ukrainian museum figures as Mykola Bilyashivskiy, Fedir Shmidt, Fedir Ernst, and Ilarion Svetsitskiy made the first attempts to formulate the concept of “museum” in the late nineteenth century – in the first third of the twentieth century. However, the these figures mentioned above do not

<sup>36</sup> DZIUBENKO, Natalie. Facebook: Natalie Dzyubenko [online]. 8 June, 2020 [accessed 2022-01-28]. Available from www: <<https://www.facebook.com/natalie.dzyubenko.9>>.

<sup>37</sup> CHMELYK, Roman. E-mail to the author. 25. 01. 2022

<sup>38</sup> DIACHUK, Iryna. E-mail to the author. 9. 11. 2021.

<sup>39</sup> ANDROSHCHUK, Fedir. E-mail to the author. 9. 11. 2021.

exhaust this list. They focused on the research, educational and educational mission of museums. Volodymyr Dubrovsky's statement about the task of museums to spread knowledge and thus improve public well-being echoes the wording of the concept of "museum" proposed in Kyoto. The most famous Ukrainian museum of the Soviet era researchers Halyna Mezentsseva and Yuriy Omelchenko focused on the educational function of the museum, as Soviet-Communist system required.

After the proclamation of Ukrainian independence in 1991 and the change of socio-political situation, the prevailing opinion in the museum space of Ukraine was the museum as an institution of social memory. This idea became more widespread after the Revolution of 2013–2014 and the war in the East. Now the researchers mostly talk about the potential of museums as sites for the restoration of national memory and Ukrainian identity. In the discussion after Kyoto 2019, ICOM Ukraine has taken the position of the need to preserve the key content of the preliminary definition. It also warns that purely formal compliance with functional criteria does not prevent museums from being transformed into a propaganda instrument for totalitarian and anti-human regimes. As I write these words, there is a cynic war going on in my country that could only be seen in the movies before. The idea of museums as spaces that should prevent war and help preserve Ukrainian identity makes unique sense.

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## STUDIE/ARTICLES

# THE ICOM INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DEFINITION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC: THE RESULTS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY AMONG REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MUSEUM COMMUNITY AND OTHER RELATED FIELDS

LUCIE JAGOŠOVÁ – OTAKAR KIRSCH

<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2022-1-4>**ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:**

The significant interest of the Czech (or Czechoslovak) museum sphere in the form and continuous revision of the existing international museum definition was already evident during Jan Jelínek's tenure at the head of ICOM in the 1970s. The effort to get involved in international debates resonates with Czech museum workers, museologists, academics and students even now, especially in connection with the planned revision of the key concept at the Prague meeting of this most important professional museum organization. The attitudes towards the existing and the optimal form of the museum definition were also examined within a local Czech questionnaire survey, which was carried out by Brno museologists in the first half of 2021 in cooperation with the Czech Committee of ICOM and the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries. The paper presents the main outcomes of the research, including the key terms that the museum definition should contain according to representatives of (not only) the museum community.

**Mezinárodní definice muzea ICOM z perspektivy České republiky: výsledky dotazníkového šetření mezi**

**zástupci muzejní obce i dalších příbuzných oborů**

Výrazný zájem českého (resp. československého) muzejnictví o podobu a průběžné revize stávající mezinárodní definice muzea je zřetelný již za působení Jana Jelínka v čele ICOM v 70. letech 20. století. Snaha o zapojení do mezinárodních debat rezonuje u zdejších muzejníků, muzeologů, akademiků i studentů rovněž v současnosti, a to zvláště v souvislosti s plánovanou revizí klíčového pojmu na pražském zasedání této nejvýznamnější profesní organizace muzeí. Právě postoje ke stávající i optimální podobě muzejní definice zkoumalo také lokální dotazníkové šetření, realizované brněnskými muzeology v první polovině roku 2021 za spolupráce s Českým výborem ICOM a Asociací muzeí a galerií České republiky. Příspěvek přiblíží hlavní závěry výzkumu, včetně klíčových pojmů, které by definice muzea měla podle představitelů (nejen) muzejní obce obsahovat.

**KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:**

*museum – museum definition – ICOM – museological research – Czech Republic – questionnaire survey*  
*muzeum – definice muzea – ICOM – muzeologický výzkum – Česká republika – dotazníkové šetření*

**1. Introduction**

The turbulent all-society development has long raised an intense need of the museum community to adequately and conceptually respond to current global challenges. One of the basic prerequisites for the implementation of particular follow-up steps in museum practice is the adoption of the generally accepted term 'museum', which is of key importance in many regards. This is also why the issue of museum definition has a steady place in the meetings of the representative international professional organization ICOM. In more recent history, an increased interest in the given topic can be noted especially since the beginning of the millennium, which resulted in a partial extension of former museum definition by the problem of intangible heritage (2007).<sup>1</sup> Another turning point was the ICOM General Conference in

<sup>1</sup> „A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.“ See The ICOM Advisory Council selects the museum definition proposal to be voted in Prague. In ICOM [online]. May 20, 2022 [accessed 2022-06-20]. Available from [www: <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-icom-advisory-council-selects-the-museum-definition-proposal-to-be-voted-in-prague/>](https://icom.museum/en/news/the-icom-advisory-council-selects-the-museum-definition-proposal-to-be-voted-in-prague/).

Milan (2016), which instigated the preparation of a new wording of the museum definition. However, this proposal eventually was not accepted in Kyoto, Japan, three years later.<sup>2</sup> The plan to discuss this issue at the next ICOM General Conference in Prague in 2022 is then accompanied by the effort to continuously capture the opinions of the museum community at the national level with the aim to achieve a stronger consensus and to temper from the very beginning any disagreements during the approval process. The main part of the appeal was to find a total of 20 key terms that the definition should contain. The direct response to this request initiated by the ICOM authorities was the development of a questionnaire prepared by the staff of the Department of Archaeology and Museology and the UNESCO Chair of Museology and World Heritage at the Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic). At the same time, this document also included other questions related mainly to the attitudes of the respondents to the currently valid ICOM international museum definition (2007), the unaccepted proposal from the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto (2019) and the current definition given in the Czech legislation (2000). The presented article then introduces a partial analysis and interpretation of data obtained from a representative sample of persons

<sup>2</sup> „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 well-being.“ See ICOM announces the alternative museum definition that will be subject to a vote. In *ICOM* [online]. July 25, 2019 [accessed 2022-06-20]. Available from [www: <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/>](https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/).

connected with the museum sphere in the Czech Republic.

## 2. A brief overview of the development of opinions and perspectives on the issue of museum definition in the Czech lands

The current discussion about the museum definition is a reflection of the long-term and in many respects complicated cultural-political development in the territory of what is now the Czech Republic.<sup>3</sup> The reflection of the museum sphere, which at the same time brought with it efforts to define the term ‘museum’, did not have a linear form here, which was influenced by changing power-political units whose representatives held different positions in determining the social role of museum institutions. Despite the partial closure, especially during the period of totalitarian regimes, foreign ideological influences, transformed in local conditions into a specific mix, took on very extensive and innovative forms with a significant impact on the museum sphere worldwide. After all, it is precisely the awareness of the specificity and the strengths and weaknesses of the past development of this field in the territory of present-day Czech Republic that can explain the (from an external point of view) relatively conservative and sensitive stands which the local museum community currently takes in the process of redefining the museum’s basic functions and mission.

The attempts to characterize the museum and its competences can be found from the very beginning

<sup>3</sup> The borders of the Czech Republic established in 1993 more or less coincide with the territory of the so-called Czech lands, which in the period under review were part of the Habsburg Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, the Czechoslovak Republic, the Greater Germanic Reich and again the Czechoslovak (Socialist) Republic.

of the activity of these institutions in the Czech lands at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Institutions containing the term ‘museum’ can already be found in earlier times (e.g. *Museum mathematicum*, *Muzeum Královské české společnosti nauk*), however, in today’s intentions, they did not meet the necessary parameters for us to label them as such.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental and at the same time the most widespread sources revealing the contemporary views on the museum phenomenon in this period are represented by the so-called statutes. Statutes were the founding and binding documents issued by the founders of individual museums (associations, societies), which contained basic information about the given institution, including its mission and activities. Even if the definitions mentioned here are clearly adapted to the specific focus and conditions of the given institution, they bring an interesting insight into general ideas about its functioning and mission. At the beginning of the 19th century, so-called proclamations had a largely similar character. Their aim was to support the newly established museum among the general public through the media of that time.<sup>5</sup> However, the museum workers themselves soon began to intervene more significantly in the definition of the key concept and at the same time found opportunities for publishing their ideas in the public space

<sup>4</sup> Above all, they lacked an initiative aimed at mediating the collections to the wider public. See also PETRÁŇ, Josef. *Muzea, kabinety a sbírky*. In PETRÁŇ, Josef. *Památky Univerzity Karlovy*. Praha: Karolinum, 1999, pp. 207–212.

<sup>5</sup> An example can be the present-day National Museum, where this declaration stated: “*The National Museum will contain everything that belongs to national literature and national production, as well as an overview of everything that was created anywhere in the homeland by nature or by human diligence.*” Provolání Františka hraběte z Kolovrat k založení Národního muzea ze dne 15. dubna 1818 (*Kramériusovy Císařské Královské Vlastenské noviny*, appendix *List nepolitický novin Kramériusových*, April 25, 1818, sheet 17) – cited after SKLENÁŘ, Karel. *Obráz vlasti: příběh národního muzea*. Praha: Paseka, 2001, p. 408.

opened up by the developing civil society. A key position was occupied by the Czech historiographer František Palacký (1798–1976), who was closely connected to the central Prague institution (today's National Museum). His concept of the museum as an “image of the homeland”,<sup>6</sup> reflecting mainly national goals, subsequently influenced the next generations of Czech museum workers until as late as 1945. However, there were also other aspects, emphasizing particularly the protective and educational roles of the museum, that have oscillated more and more significantly among these followers.<sup>7</sup> The attempts to define the museum phenomenon in the form of dictionary entries remain characteristic of the second half of the 19th century. Contemporary encyclopaedias as “sums” of the then knowledge with a significant impact on the wider public generated an image that was far away from the ideas of professional museum workers of that time. Museums are described here rather as temples representing contemporary education, art and taste, where the resulting entry was created by generalizing the authors' knowledge of the well-known Western European institutions rather than domestic institutions.<sup>8</sup>

6 PALACKÝ, František. Vlastenecké Museum v Čechách v roku 1842. In ČECH, Leander (ed.). *Františka Palackého spisy drobné*. Díl III. – podpisy aestethické a literární. Praha: Bursík a Kohout, 1903, p. 311.

7 For example, a representative of the regional museum community, Kliment Čermák, saw the basic mission of this type of museums in the fact that they should be “... a shelter for all local monuments, which only have a special significance for the place and district” and that they are “... institutions as necessary as schools”. ČERMÁK, Kliment. *O musejích městských a okresních*. Čáslav: Fr. Starch, 1886, pp. 2 and 7.

8 “...a place dedicated to science and art” where “the system and historical development of individual branches of science, art, industry, etc., are demonstrated through their representative artefacts and products, imitative preparations, tables, diagrams, etc.” *Ottův slovník naučný: Ilustrovaná encyklopaedie obecných vědomostí*. Vol. 17, Median-Navarrek. Praha, 1901, p. 890.

A fundamental contribution to defining the museum concept in the Czech environment was made by a long-lasting effort to establish the field in legislation. The main motivation of museum workers, at least initially, can be primarily found in increasing the social prestige of museums, but also in their more permanent financial security and provision of usual standards in the area of museum activities. The failures, which in this respect foreshadowed the following development for a long period of time, were caused by the lack of interest of the state and regional authorities in these cultural institutions showing very diverse goals and operating, with exceptions, in the private sphere. Nevertheless, these initiatives, appearing since the second half of the 19th century, eventually resulted in draft laws containing period-specific museum definitions, which, in addition to the enumeration of individual activities, also included passages about their specific social status.<sup>9</sup> However, these efforts did not find their fulfilment until the period of the totalitarian Czechoslovak state after 1948. The type of political power established at that time, based on directive management and control of the life of all components of society, reached the adoption of the relevant legal regulation after more than ten years of its existence. The Act on Museums and Galleries No. 54/1959 Coll. then represented a conglomerate of traditional views on the function and mission of museums, highlighting their tasks in the field of education, which were determined by

9 The most important representatives are the proposals from the period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). At that time, the issues of museums were treated not only by specific museum laws, but they should have also been legislatively anchored within more established fields which were more closely tied to the state, such as preservation of monuments and archival science. ŠPĚT, Jiří. *Přehled vývoje českého muzejnictví I. (do roku 1945)*. 2nd ed. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2003, pp. 76–78.

clear ideological intentions. The introductory preamble, explaining the motivation for the creation of the law, thus includes, for example, requests to document “the high cultural level of our people, their struggles for national independence” or “class and political struggles and achievements of the socialist development”.<sup>10</sup> However, the definition itself is a more or less standard and ideologically unencumbered text, according to which museums are “... institutes which, on the basis of investigation or scientific research, systematically collect, professionally administer and scientifically research the collections of tangible evidence – materials on the development of nature and society, on artistic creation or another kind of human activity, and use these collections for cultural and educational activities.”<sup>11</sup>

Legislative efforts after 1948 were often supplemented by representatives of museology, who saw it as a discipline based on scientific foundations. Their definitions reflected many years of experience in museum practice and therefore showed more sophisticated insights into the museum phenomenon. This was also the case with the Prague museologist Jiří Neustupný (1905–1981), whose publication *Muzeum a věda* (Museum and Science), in its English version, was also known to foreign experts. The museum appeared to him as “... an institution that, within a scientific discipline or groups of disciplines, purposefully collects and preserves transferred tangible (materials, objects), or dead sources of knowledge of nature and society. In its scientific and scientific-educational work, especially in exhibition making, the museum also uses other sources

10 Zákon č. 54/1959 Sb. o muzeích a galeriích. In *Zákony pro lidi* [online]. par. 1 [accessed 2022-06-26]. Available from www: <<https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1959-54>>.

11 Ibid., par. 2.



*from the same scientific field, which are kept by related institutions.”<sup>12</sup>*

The representatives of the Brno museology school under the leadership of Zbyňek Zbyslav Stránský (1926–2016) came up with an original solution, in which they did not classify the museum using the traditional scheme, i.e. by gradually enumerating its characteristic features. They decided to connect the given phenomenon with its very essence based on the relationship of man to reality, on the basis of which humans select, preserve and mediate the representatives of the surrounding reality according to their memory and cultural values. Museums were then considered one of the historically emerged forms for the implementation and realisation of this relationship.<sup>13</sup> After all, Czech (Czechoslovak) museology also played a fundamental role in this period when the ICOM definition was established in 1974. In this international professional organization, at that time under the leadership of the Brno museologist Jan Jelínek, the need to establish a new museum definition with regard to the rapidly changing social situation was generally accepted. Even though during the approval process itself, the tension between the socialist countries and the democratic camp was evident, still intensifying in the discussion

about the non-profitability of museums and the formulation that the museum stands “at the service of society”, these formulations were incorporated into the final form of the definition.<sup>14</sup>

New trends appeared with 1989, when museums underwent a process of wide-reaching and long-lasting transformation. The then society initially did not show major interest in the development of museums and culture in general and focused its attention mainly on the economic (fundamental transformation of the economic model) and political (transition to a pluralistic system, division of the country into the Czech Republic and Slovakia) areas. However, the needs of museum workers in often hectically changing conditions tended all the more to anchor the position of museums in the cultural life of an emerging democratic state. The initiators of a number of impulses towards the state authorities and the public were mainly the interest-based professional organization called the Association of Museums and Galleries and the Czech Committee of ICOM, in close cooperation with academic centres (Brno, Opava). It was only at the turn of the millennium that a new and still valid museum law was prepared,<sup>15</sup> but its implementation into Czech law was primarily related to the

planned accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. The term ‘museum’ was defined here as follows: “*an institution, which acquires and collects natural and human products for the purposes of science and study, explores the environment from which the natural and human products are acquired, creates collections of selected natural and human products, conserves, records and researches them, enables their usage and makes them equally accessible to all without difference by providing selected public services, which usually are not intended to make profit*”.<sup>16</sup> Its wording, along with the expanded ICOM definition of 2007, retains a fundamental importance in the reflection of the museum phenomenon among the majority of Czech museum workers and museologists, who currently mostly do not attempt to generate their own form of definition.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The design of research on the museum definition in the Czech Republic and its respondents

On the basis of a direct approach by the Czech Committee of ICOM with the assignment of a questionnaire survey among Czech museum workers, which would bring the first relevant results that could be communicated to ICOM Define as early as spring 2021, the Department of Archaeology and Museology at the Masaryk University in Brno – specifically its sub-Department of Museology and the UNESCO Chair of Museology and World Heritage – was invited to take charge of the survey in the Czech Republic at the end of

12 NEUSTUPNÝ, Jiří. *Muzeum a věda*. Praha: Kabinet muzejní a vlastivědné práce při Národním muzeu v Praze, 1968, p. 150. In addition to Neustupný, we can also recall the definition by another influential representative of the Prague museology, Josef Beneš, who saw the museum as the designation of “*a public cultural institution that, within the framework of the division of labour with other institutions, constantly creates and preserves collections of material evidence of the development of nature and society in a predefined area, or in some field of human activity, and uses them for the development of socialist science, culture and education, primarily by exhibiting them to the general public*.” BENEŠ, Josef. *Muzeologický slovník*. Praha: Národní muzeum – Ústřední muzeologický kabinet, 1978, p. 36.

13 STRÁNSKÝ, Zbyňek Z. *Úvod do studia museologie*. Brno: Univerzita J. E. Purkyně, 1979, pp. 48–50.

14 In this regard, it is certainly interesting to follow Jelínek’s thoughts at the time, concerning the new concept of the museum. The Chairman of ICOM contemplated on the need for participation between the museum and the visitor, or on the need for a sociological and ecological concept (a dialogue between man and nature) in museum work. Moravské zemské muzeum, Knihovna Ústavu Anthropol. *Osobní deníky Jana Jelínka*, 1974, vol. XVII, unpag. On the issues of development in ICOM at that time, see BAGHLI, Sid Ahmed, Patrick BOYLAN and Yanni HERREMAN. *History of ICOM (1946–1996)*. Paris 1998, pp. 24–29; 76.

15 Zákon č. 122/2000 Sb.: zákon o ochraně sbírek muzejní povahy a o změně některých dalších zákonů (Aktuální znění 01. 02. 2022 – verze 11). In *Zákony pro lidi* [online]. par. 1 [accessed 2022-03-07]. Available from www: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-122>.

16 Ibid., par. 1.

17 The ICOM museum definition is most extensively analysed by František Šebek. ŠEBEK, František. *Definice muzea a podstata jeho činnosti*. In BURIÁNKOVÁ, Michaela, Anna KOMÁRKOVÁ and František ŠEBEK (eds.). *Úvod do muzejní praxe: učební texty základního kurzu Školy muzejní propedeutiky Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky*. Praha: Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky, 2010, pp. 9–20.

2020.<sup>18</sup> The mentioned department, in cooperation with other partners (Czech Committee of ICOM, Czech Association of Museums and Galleries), conceived it as a starting step, the conclusions of which need to be debated personally among local experts in the format of a professional seminar.

The research decided to aim at finding out the opinions and attitudes of the Czech museum community towards an optimal form of the ICOM international museum definition. Based on the analysis of available sources on the development of the relationship of Czech museum workers to the museum definition and with regard to the reflection of practice, the research team established the following hypotheses for the basic processing of data from the questionnaire survey. Based on these hypotheses and their further extension, variables were determined, which were implemented through individual questions formulated for the questionnaire.

H (main hypothesis): *The attitudes of Czech museum workers towards the museum definition are rather conservative, leaning towards tradition and continuity, without major efforts for radical changes.*

The main hypothesis was further elaborated into five sub-hypotheses:

h1: *Czech museum workers are inclined to preserve the existing ICOM international museum definition, with only minor modifications to its current wording.*

h2: *For Czech museum workers, the wording of the draft museum definition, presented at the 2019 General Conference in Kyoto, is unacceptable.*

h3: *According to Czech museum workers, a fundamental change in the ICOM international museum definition could have significant effects on the sphere of museums in the Czech Republic.*

h4: *Among the main terms that an optimal international museum definition should contain, Czech museum workers mainly promote terms related to the professional management of collections and their mediation.*

h5: *The interest in communicating their own opinions through the questionnaire will be shown by respondents, the majority of whom are middle-aged, have a university education and work as regular workers in some of the professional positions in the museum sphere.*

The construction of the questionnaire “*Museum definition – questionnaire survey*” and its subsequent modifications in the first months of 2021 before the actual distribution were subjected to the necessary commenting and piloting, so that the research team could elaborate the final form of the questionnaire, ready for distribution. The preliminary research thus included the verification of the working version of the questionnaire through an expert evaluation, in which eight local museologists and museum workers were involved.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, after having incorporated the received comments, its comprehensibility and correct functionality on the electronic platform were tested with a sample of future respondents.

As a next step, the issue of awareness and ways of distributing the questionnaire were also addressed. In cooperation with local professional associations, the link to the online questionnaire, together with other information and instructions,<sup>20</sup> was distributed via e-mail among members of local museum professional organizations and posted on the website and Facebook site of the survey implementer and his partners and other cooperating institutions in the Czech Republic. It was also addressed via e-mail to employees of major Czech museums (National Museum in Prague, Moravian Museum in Brno, Silesian Museum in Opava), employees of the state administration and local government, and academic workers. Graduates and students of museology and other fields employed in museums were also approached to fill out the questionnaire. In order to achieve the widest possible awareness of museum workers and museologists in the Czech Republic, a call for participation in the questionnaire survey together with basic related information were also published in the journal *Věstník Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky 2021/1* in February 2021 as a part of the information campaign. The journal is available online and printed copies are distributed to all member institutions. The questionnaire was presented orally at the online plenary session of the Czech Committee of ICOM in March 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Respondents were given the following information and instructions: The questionnaire consists of three thematic blocks of questions. The first block is dealing with the respondent's attitudes towards the existing museum definitions. The second block looks for impulses to an optimal form of the international museum definition. The third block detects identification data about the respondent. The questionnaire mainly contains closed questions or scaling questions, where the respondent selects one or more valid answers by ticking. It also includes some open-ended questions (optional). Filling out the questionnaire takes about 30 minutes. Anonymity of individual respondents is ensured. The data will be evaluated quantitatively.

<sup>18</sup> The research team consisted of the authors of this study.

<sup>19</sup> Individual feedback was obtained from the approached representatives of professional organizations in the museum sphere, representatives from the museum practice, academic workers and collaborators representing museology and other disciplines.

After these preparatory steps, the first feedback on the museum definition and its optimal form was subsequently collected in the Czech Republic in the form of an anonymous online questionnaire survey. It consisted of a total of 27 questions divided into three thematic blocks. The research thus aimed at the interpretation of three main areas, where it investigated:

1. respondents' attitudes to the currently valid ICOM international museum definition (2007) and to the unaccepted proposal from the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto (2019);
2. definition of 20 key terms with the most frequent representation in the questionnaire, which, according to respondents, an optimal museum definition should contain;
3. placing the data in the context of basic identification details on the respondents (i.e. their number, current job position and membership in professional organizations).<sup>21</sup>

The online data collection was carried out with the help of an electronic questionnaire, accessible at [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) from February 15, 2021, and the interpretation began on March 8, 2021. In the defined period, a total of 499 respondents participated in the research. This number of respondents, which is relatively high for the Czech Republic, was undoubtedly obtained not only thanks to the long-standing interest of Czech museum workers in the issue of museum definition, but also thanks to effective intradisciplinary cooperation in ensuring awareness of the ongoing research investigation. The subsequent comprehensive

evaluation of the questionnaire by the research team took gradually place in several stages, from the spring months of 2021 to the spring of 2022. The interim results of the survey in individual stages of its processing and interpretation of the results were introduced to the local professional public in the form of an oral presentation at the Plenary Session of ICOM Czech Republic (2021) and an article published in the journal *Věstník Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky*,<sup>22</sup> to the international professional public then at the ICOM Prague pre-conference in August 2021. The planned debate of local experts took place the following year (March 2022) as a professional seminar at the Technical Museum in Brno in cooperation with the Museological Commission at the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries, where also the last part of the processed results were published.

### ***3.1 Questionnaire respondents, their occupations and relation to professional organizations***

The accomplished questionnaire survey among the professional museum and museological community in the Czech Republic, with data collection from February to March 2021, has obtained answers from a total of 499 respondents, who created a high-quality representative sample. The questionnaire primarily addressed people working in museum institutions, but the researchers were also interested in the opinions of people working in the academic sphere and in other memory institutions closely related to museums. The classification according to job position is crucial. This topic is closely related to the duration of

practice, and the involvement in museum professional organizations was also investigated. In addition to sex and age, other information about the education of individual participants was also collected for the purposes of the research. The researchers were interested not only in the education level achieved, where university-educated respondents with the title Mgr./Ing. were represented by 53 %, and other levels of education or academic qualifications were represented relatively evenly at around 11 %, with the exception of only 2% representation of people with the title doc. or prof. Also monitored was the professional focus of education, in which the humanities absolutely dominate and the other fields are significantly less represented (technical and natural sciences, artistic fields). With regard to the professional profile of researchers, it was also ascertained to what extent museology studies are represented in the monitored sample.<sup>23</sup>

There was a slight predominance of women among the survey respondents (61 %), and in terms of age, the largest number of responses was obtained from the age group 36–50 years (43 %), followed by a balanced representation of the age groups 51–60 years (25 %) and 25–35 years (23 %).

Regarding the current job position of the respondents, it was found out that a total of 73 % (366) of them are museum employees, 5 % (23) work in another cultural or memory institution, 6 % (28) are active in the academic sphere, 2 % (12) are university students and 4 % (20) of the respondents are

<sup>23</sup> The finding of only 15 % of respondents without any museum or museology-oriented education or training can be perceived as satisfactory. This fact is undoubtedly reflected in the professional orientation of the respondents and thus also in the overall qualitative level of the responses obtained.

<sup>21</sup> The processing of the results monitored the quantified data on the frequency of phenomena in both relative (number of responses) and absolute values (%; rounded to whole numbers).

<sup>22</sup> JAGOŠOVÁ, Lucie and Otakar KIRSCH. První výsledky dotazníku k definici muzea. *Věstník AMG*, 2021, no. 2, pp. 28–29.

working in state administration or local government. Other variants of the respondents' activity showed a very low representation (work outside the field of culture, independent worker, volunteer, homemakers or retired persons). Among the museum workers, the survey was mostly attended by curators and professional museum collection administrators, who make up 30 % (148) of the total number of respondents, 23 % (115) of the respondents are museum management workers and 17 % (84) represent other professional job positions in museums, such as museum pedagogue, documentalist, conservator, librarian, archivist.

From the point of view of professional networking, it was found out that only 20 % (100) of respondents are members of some international professional organization in the museum sphere. The membership in national professional museum organizations was reported by 61 % (304) of respondents and 22 % (108) reported membership in another professional organization of related fields. On the contrary, 21 % (104) of respondents stated that they are not members of any professional organization.

#### 4. Interpretation of data from the questionnaire survey

The following chapter presents the key research results, which are divided into several thematic units for better clarity and also with regard to the formulated hypotheses. The first of them is dealing with the interpretation of the point of view of Czech museum workers on the relevance of solving the issue of museum definition at the present time. The following section focuses on uncovering the respondents' attitudes to several museum definitions that have been debated in international and

local conditions. In the subsequent part, the key terms are introduced, which, from the point of view of Czech museum workers, should be included in the museum definition. In addition to closed questions with one or more possible answers and scaling questions, the questionnaire also offered space for free answers by respondents. This structure made it possible to apply the methodological concept of a mixed research, using dominantly quantitative approaches for data analysis, but also with representation of certain parts corresponding to the qualitative processing of research results. The obtained hard statistical data, where possible, are supplemented in the interpretation part by the research team with selected comments of respondents from free optional questions, which are presented here in an unedited form. For the authors of the survey, a very valuable finding was the level of involvement of the respondents in these optional questions, which required a deeper reflection on their own opinions and attitudes. Due to the wide range of responses collected, the willingness to share one's own thoughts and the spectrum of statements obtained in the questionnaire, the last part of this chapter is devoted to the categorization of the respondents' attitudes towards specific modifications which, according to them, should be reflected in the currently valid ICOM international museum definition, the validity of which would thus, after certain revision, be extended into the next period.

##### 4.1 The importance of dealing with the museum definition from the perspective of respondents

As it emerged from the research, 74 % (370) of respondents already had some **awareness of the currently ongoing debates on**

**redefining** the ICOM international museum definition before filling out the questionnaire (24 % of them know about the issue by hearsay, 34 % have basic information and 16 % stated to have more detailed information together with an active interest). When filling out the questionnaire, 26 % (129) of respondents reported that the information was new for them. The reason might be the involvement of students or academics who did not grasp the issue until then and do not regularly read the journal *Věstník Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky*, which is distributed to all member museums and members from academic departments with a connection to the museum sphere. A role may also be played by the forcibly changed way of communicating this information during the COVID-19 lockdown, which shifted personal interaction to the online environment during the observed period.

A full 74 % of respondents **consider it essential to debate the museum definition** – 35 % of them understand the museum definition as one of more current topics; for some respondents, it is an important (31 %) or even fundamental (8 %) topic for further development of museums. Among the respondents, however, we also find those for whom the issue is marginal (16 %) or completely unnecessary (7 %). Only 3 % of respondents do not have their own opinion on this question or they cast doubt upon the need for a museum definition as such (mere 2 respondents). From the point of view of the interpretation of the questionnaire, this is a significant finding of a wider spectrum of opinions within the represented research sample, which is therefore not limited to a black-and-white view of the issue.



60 % of respondents expressed an interest in following up on the questionnaire survey with a broader intradisciplinary discussion within the Czech museum sphere (25 % of these respondents definitely expressed yes), on the other hand, a total of 30 % gave answers rather no or no. Again, there remain 10 % of respondents who were unable to give a clear opinion. This information was perceived as a clear confirmation of the need for personal debates on the topic and also contributed to the motivation of local professional organizations to make the intention of holding a discussion meeting come true.

#### **4.2 Attitudes of Czech museum workers towards individual museum definitions and possible impacts of the formulation of the definition on Czech museum sphere**

In the Czech museum community, we can consider the museum definition a vivid topic arousing the interest of experts and a topic that is currently being debated. As can be seen from the answers, only 5 % of respondents (25 persons) consider it unimportant to deal with the museum definition, and mere 2 % (8) do not have their own opinion on this question. Another bulk of questions was aimed at finding out the attitudes of the Czech respondents towards the museum definitions, with which they may have been confronted in the present and recent past in an international and local perspective. Herewith we mean the currently valid ICOM international museum definition of 2007, then the draft of the international museum definition, which was presented but not accepted at the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto in 2019, and thirdly, the respondents were asked about the Czech legislative definition as stated in the Act No.

122/2000 Coll. on the protection of museum collections.<sup>24</sup>

If we briefly summarize the data obtained from the survey and the view of the Czech respondents on the two mentioned international formulations of the museum definition, a full 72 %, which represent 360 respondents, lean towards the valid ICOM museum definition (version of 2007) as a satisfactory form of the international museum definition. Of this number, 79 persons are in favour of maintaining the existing definition in its unchanged form, 215 would suggest only minor modifications and 66 are in favour of more significant modifications of this existing definition. In contrast, the unaccepted proposal from Kyoto 2019 has the support of 12 % (58) of respondents – of whom 6 have no reservations about its wording, 26 would make minor and 26 would make significant changes to its wording. 6 % (29) of respondents consider both definitions acceptable at the same time (the currently valid ICOM version of 2007 as well as the unaccepted proposal from Kyoto 2019), while 4 % (19) regard both definitions as unsatisfactory.

The respondents were also asked to express how accurate and satisfactory these definitions are. The aptness of the **valid ICOM international museum definition (from 2007)** is positively assessed by 89 % of respondents (of whom 34 % consider it completely apposite and 55 % rather apposite). Only 9 % expressed a negative opinion (i.e. the answer is rather no, no) and mere 2 % of respondents cannot judge the issue. How satisfactory is this definition according to the respondents? Its

suitability was indicated by 77 % of respondents (of whom 30 % found it completely suitable and 47 % rather suitable). According to 19 % of respondents, this definition is not suitable (2 % of them consider it completely unsuitable and 17 % rather unsuitable). The remaining 4 % of respondents cannot assess it.

When interested, the respondents could add their verbal comments to the chosen answer in a separate optional question.<sup>25</sup> The open-ended answers show that the respondents are talking more about the desirability of updating the existing definition, revising some parts or terms used – not about the need to formulate a completely new definition from the ground up. Critical comments addressed to the existing definition included a lack of overlap with the current role of museums in society, the absence of some topical terms and a reflection of the changes that have taken place since its formulation. From the large number of answers, we chose three examples of respondents' attitudes:

- *"I think it contains everything essential. In theory, some reformulation is possible, but it will not change the content much."*
- *"If something really works, such as the currently valid museum definition, then we should be very careful with any change that could not only mean the demise of the present, but would also certainly bring the risk of non-functionality of the future."*

<sup>24</sup> In the questionnaire, the respondents were presented with the international museum definition translated into the Czech language, in the wording of the official version of the translation, approved by the Czech Committee of ICOM and commonly used in the Czech museum environment

<sup>25</sup> With individual verbal comments, respondents could add explanations or other supplements to the general expression of their attitudes. This response was optional and the extent of the message was limited by the number of characters. We quote these personal statements of the respondents in a literal translation – they therefore copy colloquial expressions or stylistic mistakes in the Czech version.

- *“It certainly affects the essence of the definition from the point of view of the Czech Republic, it revolves around the collection, which is of key importance for us, however, I understand that there are pressures to emphasize or promote the experiential and inclusive nature of the museum.”*

If we focus attention on the “alternative” proposal presented at the international plenary session, only 25 % of Czech respondents agree with the unaccepted **draft museum definition from Kyoto (2019)** in terms of relevance (4 % of them expressed a clear yes), 68 % of respondents have a negative opinion on the relevance (of whom 41 % consider it rather unsatisfactory and 27 % unsatisfactory). 7 % of respondents cannot assess it. 18 % of respondents consider the proposal from Kyoto a suitable form of the international museum definition (4 % of them answered yes and 14 % rather yes); on the contrary, 74 % of respondents take a negative standpoint (among them an equal number of respondents say rather no and definitely no). 8 % of respondents cannot assess this question. Analogously, this question also had the possibility of an optional verbal comment. If we summarize the reactions of Czech museum workers, then according to them, the unaccepted definition from Kyoto 2019 is not even a definition by its very nature; it is too complicated and incomprehensible. They feel the lack of emphasis on collections, scientific research and presentation of knowledge (education). The version is not timeless in their eyes. Some respondents fear the possible risk of political misuse of the museum, they sense an ideological touch of political correctness in it. Some draw attention to the excessive complexity of the wording and the terms used, which make the text unable to reach and be

understood by a wider public. From a large number of diverse reactions, we again chose a few examples of respondents’ statements:

- *“This is not a definition, it does not describe the character of the institution and the professional museum activities.”*
- *“The wording is complicated, difficult to understand and glosses too much over current trends, so it is not timeless and is unusable for the average person.”*
- *“By this definition, the museum is interchangeable with other institutions.”*
- *“It is defining the framework of activities, agenda and scope of activities, I like the openness and emphasis on community, openness, understanding of the world, but it does not fully capture the essence. It completely neglects the function of education, it contains a lot of contemporary conflicts, it is not timeless.”*
- *“It is a too activist definition that does not take into account the misuse of these formulations by authoritarian regimes to discredit the museum work itself, and the misuse of collections leading to disappearance of the evidence of the past (but also of the present) that contradicts the official interpretation.”*
- *“In my opinion, this would be a too radical change, which may also have a negative legislative impact in some parts of the world and, possibly, an impact on the funding of museums.”*

The third of the definitions, on which the respondents had to take their stand for completeness of content, was the **Czech legislative museum definition stipulated**

**in Act No. 122/2000 Coll.** on the protection of museum collections and on the change of some other laws, as amended.<sup>26</sup> From the research data obtained, we can infer that the Czech legislative museum definition is apposite for 81 % of respondents (for 27 % yes, for 54 % rather yes); on the other hand, 18 % of respondents do not consider it apposite (in the sum of answers no and rather no). Mere 1 % cannot judge. 74 % of respondents consider this definition satisfactory (24 % clearly yes, the others rather yes) and for a total of 24 % it is rather unsatisfactory or unsatisfactory. Only 2 % of respondents cannot assess it. It is obvious that the respondents move more easily in the local environment (they know the legislation and use it in their museum practice) and also this definition resonates better with the local conditions for them. The fact that an update of these local legislative measures has been expected for some time may be reflected in the form of some negative responses to this definition.

Another aspect investigated was the determination of respondents’ opinions on the **possible effects of the wording of the valid museum definition – both international and local – on the Czech museums**. The question was: Do the currently valid museum definitions correspond to the

<sup>26</sup> In the Czech museum legislation, a museum is defined as follows: “Museum is an institution, which acquires and collects natural and human products for the purposes of science and study, explores the environment from which the natural and human products are acquired, creates collections of selected natural and human products, conserves, records and researches them, enables their usage and makes them equally accessible to all without difference by providing selected public services, which usually are not intended to make profit. Gallery is a museum specialized in art collections.” See Zákon č. 122/2000 Sb.: zákon o ochraně sbírek muzejní povahy a o změně některých dalších zákonů (Aktuální znění 01. 02. 2022 – verze 11). In *Zákony pro lidi* [online]. par. 2, point 4 [accessed 2022-03-07]. Available from [www: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-122>](http://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-122).

present state and needs of museums in the Czech Republic?

When assessing the currently valid ICOM international museum definition (2007), a total of 11 % of respondents (57) cannot assess the relevance of the valid ICOM museum definition towards the current needs of the Czech museum sphere. A total of 69 % of respondents gave a positive answer – i.e. for 16 %, the valid international museum definition fully corresponds to the situation in Czech museums, and for 53 %, the answer was rather yes. 20 % of respondents gave a negative answer (of whom 18 % answered rather no and 2 % no). It is quite interesting that the Czech legislative museum definition, which is based on the international definition, but is formulated in a unique form, shows almost identical expressions of the respondents regarding its relevance – the differences in responses are a maximum of two percent for individual answers.

In order to determine the impact of the unaccepted definition from Kyoto (2019), the question was formulated in this context as follows: Do you think that a significant change to the current ICOM definition (e.g. in the form of the wording of the proposal from Kyoto 2019) could have significant impacts on the sphere of Czech museums? In response to this more general question, whether or not a fundamental change in the museum definition could have significant impacts on the sphere of Czech museums, even 49 % of respondents think not (of whom 37 % answered rather no, and 12 % no). On the contrary, 33 % are convinced that the answer is yes (of whom 13 % answered yes and 20 % rather yes). A considerable number of respondents (18 %) cannot assess this situation. In a separate open-ended question, where they could

formulate their own opinion or add a comment to their answer, the respondents reacted to the change as such and its possible impacts, and the majority of them commented directly on the impacts that a change in the definition in the form of the Kyoto 2019 proposal would bring. From the respondents' free answers follows that they perceive both positives ("a breath of fresh air", a process of change) and negatives (threats of disruption of the fragile infrastructure in the Czech museum sphere, or in a wider cultural sphere), along with scepticism/assumption of stagnation (even if the definition changes, no change does occur in practice). In opinions on the potential impacts of the definition in the wording from Kyoto, efforts towards openness and communication appeared among the positives, while concerns, on the contrary, were aimed at determining the appropriate degree of a possible trend of loosening the definition. Other responses contained references to a political line of thinking, as well as direct concerns about ideologization in the museum sphere. From a large number of responses, we again chose a few examples:

- *"The new definition of 'Kyoto' would also have an effect on the redefinition of our law and would also mean changes in the possibilities of drawing public money, even on an international scale. With the new definition, I see a possible limitation of research topics and the scope of museum work in our environment."*
- *"Reflection of existing approaches, possibly faster changes in approaches with regard to current trends in society. The use of modern approaches to interpretation..."*

- *"I am afraid that if a definition similar to that of the Kyoto 2019 General Conference would be adopted at any time in the future, then institutions that are not actually museums, or at least not in my ideas of museums, might pass themselves off as museums."*
- *"The definition is very activist, it would give politicians the tools to eliminate professional work in museums."*
- *"Inauspicious, there is a lack of emphasis on collections. Museums would become disreputable community centres."*

If we summarize the key findings obtained from the results of this part of the survey, we can state that Czech museum workers understand the definition of the museum in such a way that it builds on tradition and forms a concept which is generally acceptable from an international point of view. For Czech museum workers, stability, continuity and resistance to current fads are essential; if a change will be introduced, then it should not be radical, due to concerns about the impact on legislation and everyday museum practice.

#### 4.3 Relevance of terms for the museum definition

On the basis of the ICOM Define call through the Czech Committee of ICOM, more than 70 terms were generated for the purposes of the questionnaire, from which the respondents had to mark those that, in their opinion, should form the main axis of the new museum definition. The currently valid ICOM definition, the proposal from Kyoto and the Czech legislative museum definition were used during the selection. The terms extracted from these primary sources were supplemented with

Order	Term	Percentage	Number of respondents
1.	HERITAGE	83 %	411
2.	LEARNING	79 %	394
3.	EDUCATION	71 %	354
4.	COLLECTIONS	71 %	353
5.	RESEARCH	70 %	347
6.	PROTECTION	69 %	343
7.	EXPERTISE	68 %	338
8.	KNOWLEDGE	67 %	332
9.	CULTURE	66 %	330
10.	PUBLIC	66 %	327
11.	DOCUMENTATION	65 %	322
12.	TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE EVIDENCE	65 %	321
13.	MEMORY	64 %	320
14.	ACCESSIBILITY	62 %	307
15.	HUMAN	59 %	296
16.	PRESERVATION	59 %	294
17.	PRESENTATION	58 %	289
18.	PAST	57 %	283
19.	FUTURE	57 %	282
20.	CARE	55 %	276

Tab. 1: Twenty most represented terms

other expressions, which are widely used and customary in the present-day museological, sociological and philosophical discourse.<sup>27</sup> The respondent could

<sup>27</sup> At this point, a few explanatory words should be added to the list of key terms for the museum definition that would otherwise be lost in translation. The list of selected key terms for the Czech Republic includes several that relate to the field of education. The Czech language does not only use the international term 'education' (in Czech = *edukace*), but further specifies it into two basic components of intentional impact on individuals and the corresponding other separate terms. One is understood as the development of an individual in the field of cognitive knowledge and skills (in Czech = *vzdělávání*) – here see the term 'learning'. The deliberate influence on the behaviour of an individual and his/her attitudes and values was translated by us here as 'pedagogy' (this corresponds to a separate Czech

evaluate the relevance of individual terms with the yes/no options, where the number of positive answers was not limited in any way. If the respondents missed a corresponding expression for the museum definition in the list, they could directly enter it into a text box located below the offer. Respondents in many cases used the options offered, while they missed the terms such as: disciplinarity/specialization, environment,

term = *výchova*). We believe that this note will help to understand this wider representation of pedagogical terms among the 20 key terms, as selected by 499 museum workers, academics and museologists from the Czech Republic.

evidence, reality, communication, identity, public service, innovation, professionalism, representative, virtual reality, community, gender, restoration, art, inspiration, thinking, evolution, creativity, play, human rights, independence, profitability, inspiration.

The data obtained created a relatively wide range for individual terms, where the lower limit was 36 responses (8.2 %) and the upper limit was 411 responses (82.4 %). As can be seen from the attached table of the twenty most prominent terms (Tab. 1), the highest values were achieved with heritage (411, 82.4 %), learning (394, 79 %), education and collections (both 354, 70.9 %). The percentage over 60 % was also achieved with terms like research, protection, expertise, knowledge, public, memory, culture, documentation, tangible and intangible evidence, accessibility. Among the 20 most frequently mentioned values (over 50% occurrence) the respondents included heritage, learning, education, collections, research, protection, expertise, knowledge, culture, public, documentation, tangible and intangible evidence, memory, accessibility, human, preservation, presentation, past, future and care. There was a very thin boundary between these selected terms rounding out the top twenty and some of the other marked terms. The following significantly represented terms, which also exceeded the 50% occurrence threshold, did not make it into the representative list: study (275, 55.1 %), science (268, 53.7 %), pedagogy and collecting (265, 53.1 %), exhibition (262, 52.5 %) and society (256, 51.3 %). On the contrary, the least frequent were: democratisation (57, 11.4 %), inclusion (50, 10 %) and global equality (41, 8.2 %). The results of the research once again clearly confirm the fact that the



respondents preferred the terms included in the existing definitions (international, Czech legislation) rather than those from the Kyoto proposal. Nevertheless, the list of the most represented terms does not include ones like institution (41 %) and non-profitability (36 %).

#### **4.4 The valid ICOM international definition of 2007 as a starting point for redefinition? Attitudes and recommendations of Czech museum workers regarding its possible revision**

The attitudes of respondents in the Czech research on the museum definition revealed a strong inclination towards the currently valid ICOM international museum definition (2007), which even today is perceived by Czech museum workers as apposite (for 89 % of respondents) and meeting current needs (for 77 % of respondents). In its unchanged form, or with certain corrections, in the opinion of the vast majority of Czech museum workers, it could continue to serve as a characteristic of the museum institution on an international scale. We therefore assume that the respondents perceive it as a good starting point for further debates on whether to leave it unchanged or to update it with regard to current needs. Due to the large amount of data obtained from individual verbal comments of the respondents, in which they reacted to this question, the next part of the text will focus on the interpretation of these free answers. By identifying the main common features, we will follow up several characteristic groups of reactions that occurred most often; these are documented in the text with selected verbatim quotations from respondents' statements from the questionnaire survey. In contrast to the previous parts of the text, we do not evaluate these attitudes here quantitatively

(by expressing the number of occurrences as a percentage), but based on the interpretation of the main types of opinion expressions. The respondents expressed in them their perceived problematic areas (what is missing, redundant or not properly formulated in the definition) and in some cases even presented specific proposals for reformulation. The following typology of approaches contains again a selection of a smaller number of particular responses for a short summarizing interpretation of statements in the given category.

##### **4.4.1 There is no need to change the valid museum definition**

With this title, we can summarize the key standpoint of some of the respondents, who expressed support for the valid museum definition in their statements. They either feel no need to change the definition because it is satisfactory in its current form, or they perceive certain risks if it were to be modified. They do not fail to emphasize that the existing definition fulfils the criterion of being comprehensible to both the professional community and the non-professional public.

- *“The museum definition is quite apposite and covers all the basic functions of a museum. Everything else we can say about the museum is always derived from some of the terms mentioned in this definition. It is sufficiently professional and comprehensible as well to non-professionals.”*
- *“The current definition is, on the one hand, sufficiently comprehensive and, on the other hand, non-conflict for various socio-cultural circles.”*
- *“If something really works, such as the currently valid museum*

*definition, then we should be very careful with any change that could not only mean the demise of the present, but would also certainly bring the risk of non-functionality of the future.”*

- *“Museums are traditional organizations that have held their ground for centuries. Historically, we know that politicising or just pressure for social activation has always ended in failure and an immediate or gradual decrease of the museum's credit among society.”*

##### **4.4.2 It is sufficient to update the valid museum definition**

Another group of respondents agree that the current museum definition should be preserved, but it is necessary to adapt it to current needs in a certain way, given the time that has passed since its formulation. The respondents' formulations are rather general, or slightly instructive in which direction to correct this definition, but they usually do not provide specific suggestions on how to precisely reformulate the existing definition.

- *“In my opinion, the old definition only needs to be supplemented so that it corresponds better to the present.”*
- *“It captures the essence of the museum, it is a true definition. It does not sufficiently embrace the museum as a public service.”*
- *“Missing from the definition is that museums document both the past and the present.”*
- *“The museum definition reflects the general goals of all museums, but in the 21st century it no longer meets the ideas and requirements of society, which*

*expects more from a museum than only the basic activity in the form of selection, thesaurisation and presentation of objects in museum premises.”*

- *“It is true that the expectations of society and museum founders have changed and museums are expected to apply a more activist approach, but the question is whether or not they should follow this trend. I agree that the current definition should be updated.”*
- *“The current definition is probably not entirely precise if we are talking about ‘new’ types of museums such as some open air museums or living history farms.”*

#### 4.4.3 Weaknesses of the existing definition – what and how should be modified?

A significant part of the respondents showed their own well-considered and classified attitudes and thoughts about how and with which particular amendments it would be appropriate to change, enrich or terminologically specify the formulation of the currently valid museum definition. These respondents tried to identify problematic areas of the current definition, where a revision of its wording should be considered. We can divide the spectrum of these recommended changes and particular proposed amendments into several sub-groups, depending on which part of the definition they focused on, or which of the included terms or formulations they considered worthy of revision.

#### Accentuation of the importance of the museum and its irreplaceability

A certain number of respondents considered it essential in their verbal comments to draw attention

to the need to sufficiently emphasize or strengthen the museum’s significance or some aspects of its (expected) impact, which should also be reflected in the modification of the wording of the museum definition.

- *“An important and irreplaceable institution.”*
- *“It is important to incorporate the word necessary, in the sense that a museum is necessary for the development and future of society.”*
- *“The museum has far more possibilities of activity.”*
- *“The definition should also reflect something like SCR, the issue of sustainability, etc.”*
- *“It does not take into account the critical potential of functioning and challenges of the globalized world of the 21st century.”*
- *“The definition lacks the specification of a museum collection.”*

#### “Permanent” and “non-profitable”?

Both of these terms, included in the first part of the valid museum definition, can be perceived in the context of the Czech museum sphere as long-term debated and commented on, especially the issue of non-profitability. In this context, the respondents draw attention to certain profitable activities of museums, as well as to the existence of a number of corporate and private museums. The comments also logically allude to the complexity of searching for suitable expressions, which is, moreover, made much more difficult (not only with these terms) when translating the original wording of the definition into the Czech language.

- *“The definition is basically accurate, the only term that loses weight in the definition is the word ‘permanent’. Currently, there is really little that we can define as permanent, and even the museum itself slowly begins to move out of this category.”*
- *“I think the definition captures the basic idea, but I am sure some supplements still could be added. Problems may arise with the term ‘non-profit institution’. The term ‘institution, which is not primarily targeted at profit making’ would be more appropriate.”*
- *“I don’t think that the museum is a non-profit institution, because a) it earns from entrance fees, b) it receives payments for assessments, or for work commissioned from it, for example archaeological works, assessments of objects, etc.”*
- *“In my opinion, museums of today do not have to be 100% non-profitable. What about private museum institutions, for example? If they did not make money, they would cease to exist...”*

#### The museum’s role in society, its relationship with the public, education and popularisation

The word formulations included in this group have a common effort to respond to another part of the valid museum definition, which deals with the museum service of society. A number of respondents draw attention to the fact that the role of the museum in contemporary society has undergone a transformation and the museum-visitor relationship is also changing, which should be reflected in the revision of the current definition. At the same time, they draw attention to the importance of museum

education, which guards the adequate and meaningful mediation of the museum's message in a way that would not misappropriate the museum's mission and degrade it. In this context, both didactic and technical means are used. The use of the latter ones has become increasingly important in museums in recent years.

- “Better define ‘serves the society’ ...?”
- “Today, museums fulfil far more social roles than before, it could be supplemented.”
- “The definition could take into account recent educational trends, but it is also necessary to realize that the collections-building museums cannot substitute the scientific amusement parks. The basis of our activity is the care of cultural heritage and its presentation.”
- “I think [...] museums are at the same time more interactive and evoke emotions, so they are not just about exhibitions.”
- “Reservations: 1. mediation of exhibits does not necessarily refer to ‘man and their environment’ as an object (e.g. a permanent exhibition of products of nature), but man is the organizer and the audience of exhibitions; 2. the museum offers space for more activities and can more actively shape the society.”

#### Social involvement of museums, values in society, dialogue and relationship with communities

A group of several statements is thematically directly connected to the previous group of reactions, but rather than the question of public relations and education, it deals more specifically with interaction with the audience

and the involvement of museums in current all society debates. A related theme that repeatedly resonates is also the emphasis on the museum's connection to the communities and the wide openness and equal approach of museums to the public. There were also voices that proclaimed the need for incorporating the issues of gender, environment, inclusion and existence in the online space into the definition.

- “The existing definition does not at all take into account the role of the museum as an instigator of dialogue and a host of social debate. It is a question whether the museum definition must be so anthropocentric.”
- “The current definition lacks that the museum is also a place of dialogue.”
- “I believe that the current definition fully captures the basic characteristics and activity of most museums, however, it lacks other new concepts and definitions that arose in the modern history of museums by expanding their activities and actions within communities and society.”
- “The current definition is brief and yet apposite, as a definition should be. Perhaps it should be supplemented with: Through their activities, museums also contribute to the resolution of current conflicts and challenges and to mutual understanding.”
- “The museum seems to me a much more dynamic institution today, it cultivates, educates throughout life, as a regional cultural centre.”
- “The active role of museums in community building is missing from the definition. Many

*museums (not really in our country, but rather in Europe and beyond) open discussions about current problems with their exhibitions, try to convince the visitor to take a position on topical problems.”*

- “Does not embrace the online space and inclusion.”

#### Relationship to place, identity and regional development

Among the last opinion groups, we rather find a partial point of view or a reminder of certain other links and perspectives, which are of key importance for some respondents, regarding the scope of museums or their activities at the present time. Among these topics, it is repeatedly recalled that museums are also defined by where they are located and where they operate. They are part of a certain region, its cultural and natural environment and participate in local cultural events and the development of tourism, which, according to some respondents, should not be left out of the museum definition.

- “From my point of view, there is a lack of greater emphasis on the preservation of cultural heritage and values, which are a determining factor of our identity (be it at the national or regional level).”
- “I would clarify the wording ‘man and his cultural and natural environment’, or in a similar sense – because the present-day museums emphasize only the cultural environment.”
- “In my opinion, the definition does little to express the documentation of nature.”
- “I believe that the definition is missing a part which would also present the museum as an

*institution that contributes to the cultural uplifting of a town or region. It may follow from one part of the definition. But I lack a specific focus. However, it depends on the museum's quality."*

#### The desirability of reflecting new technologies and "digital born"

A not negligible area for the museum definition, which some of the respondents drew attention to in their statements, are the individual aspects connected with the digital environment, the use of information and communication technologies, the existence of intangible cultural heritage and "digital born" collection objects. These are topics that current museum practice deals with, and which, in the opinion of some respondents, should also be reflected in the current understanding of the museum.

- *"I think that the definition still covers the essence of museum work, the only area where the discussion needs to be expanded is the area of intangible cultural heritage, especially in relation to the definitions of collection objects that are digital born."*
- *"The definition should probably be extended to the digital environment, as digital born collections do not fully describe the definition of intangible cultural heritage."*

#### Imbalance in the effect of the definition on the diverse typology of existing museums

The last identified group of verbal comments are reactions to the (excessive) generality of the formulated museum definition. Some of the respondents pose themselves a question whether the museum definition can be

"universal", generally formulated in such a way that it can be applied to any of the very wide spectrum and typology of existing museums. From their point of view, the valid museum definition may not fully reflect, for example, the situation of small or private museums. Also revealed is here the very basic question of the balance of the entire range of professional museum activities, and the question to what extent of professional activities and overall scope should we actually perceive the museum at present.

- *"I see the definition of present-day museum on a broader level and, moreover, not bound in a mandatory state or non-profit environment."*
- *"It is focused on large state and city museums, neglecting small and private museums."*
- *"The definition does not take into account the existence of private, corporate museums, mixed institutions with 'only' a museum component, does not solve the question of time (predominance of the past over the present?), functional question – services outside the framework of a particular museum – conservation, promotion, etc."*

### 5. Research outcomes

The questionnaire survey among the professional museum and museological community in the Czech Republic was attended by 499 respondents, of whom 73 % are museum employees, mainly curators and professional collection administrators, management staff and other professional museum jobs. A full 72 % of respondents are inclined to the current ICOM museum definition (2007) as a satisfactory form of the definition, subject to certain modifications. The unaccepted proposal from

Kyoto 2019 is supported by 12 % of respondents, 6 % consider both definitions acceptable at the same time, and for 4 % both definitions are unsatisfactory. Among the 20 preferred terms/values for the museum definition with the most frequent occurrences, which were also submitted to ICOM Define in 2021 in the name of the Czech museums, the respondents selected the following: heritage, learning, education, collections, research, protection, expertise, knowledge, culture, public, documentation, tangible and intangible evidence, memory, accessibility, human, preservation, presentation, past, future, care.

The research shows that Czech museum workers prefer to base their museum definition on tradition. Stability, continuity and resistance to current fads are key for them. If any change is to occur, then it should not be radical, which is justified by their concerns about possible adverse effects on legislation and museum practice. This confirms the main research hypothesis "The attitudes of Czech museum workers towards the museum definition are rather conservative, inclined to tradition and continuity, without major efforts for radical changes" and the sub-hypotheses h1 (inclination to the current ICOM international museum definition), h2 (unacceptability of the draft definition from Kyoto in 2019) and h4 (in the selection of terms suitable for the museum definition, the top 20 terms include those related to the professional management of collections and their mediation). From the point of view of quantitative data evaluation, hypothesis h3 "According to Czech museum workers, a fundamental change in the ICOM international museum definition could have significant effects on the sphere of museums in



the Czech Republic” can be neither confirmed nor denied. Although these reactions are strongly echoed in the responses of Czech museum workers in the form of free answers, it is not a dominant preponderance of answers. At the same time, it was an optional question, which was not answered by a full 100 % of respondents (although the number of responses was significantly more than half). Moreover, potential impacts are not perceived by the respondents in a unified context – some regard them as a threat (expected negative impacts), while some others understand them as an impulse to favourable changes (a vision of positive changes and possible impacts resulting from them). The last of the sub-hypotheses h5 “The interest in communicating their own opinions through the questionnaire will be shown by respondents, the majority of whom are middle-aged, have a university education and work as regular workers in some of the professional positions in the museum sphere” was only partially confirmed. More than half of the respondents were indeed museum workers in professional positions, and their educational attainment was mostly university (53 % graduates of a master’s/ engineer’s degree, followed by 4 % of a bachelor’s degree and 12 % of a doctoral degree). However, the age spectrum in individual categories proved wider than assumed, where 43 % of respondents fell within the group of 36–50 years, followed by the percentage-balanced age groups of 51–60 years (25 %) and 25–35 years (23 %).

A similarly broad-ranged plenum and diverse spectrum of opinions, compared to the presented research conclusions summarized above, then in a more limited number participated in a thematic conference discussion meeting on the museum definition at the

Technical Museum in Brno in the spring of 2022. Individual standpoints of the participants and lines of opinion were published bilingually, in the form of a collected volume „*Nová definice muzea aneb její klady a zápory*“/ “*New Definition of the Museum: Its Pros and Cons*”, with the ambition of introducing the international professional public to this form of local debates among Czech museum workers and museologists over the international museum definition.

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## METODICKÉ A INFORMAČNÍ TEXTY/METHODICAL AND INFORMATIVE TEXTS

## THE ICOM MUSEUM DEFINITION: ICOM GERMANY BETWEEN FUNCTIONARIES, MEMBERS, AND ACTIVISTS

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MARKUS WALZ

**Traditional committee work**

The ICOM standing committee tasked with drafting a proposed definition since 2017, signalled seeing a larger context with its name, “*Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials*” (MDPP). Its president, Jette Sandahl, promoted that a museum definition must acknowledge and critically reflect the “legacy” and continued presence of social inequality, the asymmetries of power and wealth.<sup>1</sup> Sandahl left open how something can be defined and at the same time another matter can be “recognised”. Two opportunities were offered to transport thoughts directly to the international level: to organise an expert discussion on trends and challenges of the near future and to send in draft definitions. ICOM Germany did not make use of either option, but 12 members (including the author) sent in their own draft definitions.<sup>2</sup>

In 2018, a joint conference of the three German-speaking ICOM national committees on the minimum requirement of the museum definition made it clear that not all museums fulfil the

current ICOM museum definition: Some museums do not have the opportunity to acquire further collection items (because they already have everything available), other museums do not generate any new knowledge themselves, although collection research is one of the core tasks.<sup>3</sup> One conclusion would be to shorten the current ICOM museum definition.

A summary of the conference results was sent to ICOM International. No reaction was noticeable; the same was true of the 269 definition proposals sent in. Only the Kyoto resolution proposal activated the board of ICOM Germany. A memorandum to the president of the world association dated 6 August 2019 pointed out deficiencies in the wording, including the lack of a definition of the museum as a permanent institution. Together with 33 other ICOM committees, Germany supported the successful motion of ICOM Europe in Kyoto on 7 September 2019 to postpone the resolution and to discuss it further in the framework of the Advisory Council.<sup>4</sup>

**Participation demands from outside, more internal communication**

After Kyoto, there was a prolonged standstill at ICOM International. During this period, public criticism of ICOM Germany’s conduct was voiced through an open letter, which was offered for co-signature on an internet platform as of 7 November 2019.<sup>5</sup> This text achieved 294 signatures, including nine from abroad; of the 245 non-anonymised signatures, only 75 came from ICOM members – on the internet, every person is allowed to have a say. This open letter accused ICOM Germany of a lack of appreciation for participation, inclusion, diversity and social justice and wished for greater consideration of societal changes in the debate. Decolonisation, empowerment for self-representation, diversification of knowledge and images of history and overcoming national-centred thinking were listed.

In order to clarify the position, the board of ICOM Germany used a survey by the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) from November 2019 to all national and

1 SANDAHL, Jette. Addressing societal responsibilities through core museum functions and methods: the museum definition, prospects and potentials. *Museum International*, 2019, vol. 71, no. 281–282, pp. IV–V.

2 Where no footnote is inserted below, the presentation is based (as it is here) on the annual reports in ICOM Germany’s members’ journal “Mitteilungen”: 2020, vol. 27 = issue 42, pp. 5–8; 2021, vol. 28 = issue 43, pp. 28–29.

3 WALZ, Markus (ed.). *Museum: ausreichend. Die „untere Grenze“ der Museumsdefinition. Internationales Bodensee-Symposium von ICOM Schweiz, ICOM Österreich und ICOM Deutschland, 21.–23.06.2018 in Friedrichshafen*. [online]. Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2020 [accessed 2022-01-31]. Available from [www: <http://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/arthistoricum/catalog/book/565>](http://www.books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/arthistoricum/catalog/book/565).

4 The document was available on the ICOM Europe website. This website has been unavailable

for the last few months (January and September 2022).

5 Offener Brief an die Vertreter\*innen von ICOM Deutschland. In *OpenPetition* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-31]. Available from [www: <http://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/offener-brief-an-die-vertreterinnen-von-icom-deutschland#petition-main-5>](http://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/offener-brief-an-die-vertreterinnen-von-icom-deutschland#petition-main-5).

international committees on how they and their members assessed the current museum definition and the Kyoto resolution proposal; in addition, they were asked about any “key concepts” that might be missing. ICOM Germany developed this into an online survey of its members in December 2019, which yielded 302 responses (4.6 % of the 6,501 members). 80.8 % rated the current definition as a good museum definition or one that could only be slightly improved, while 47.4 % attributed this character to the Kyoto resolution proposal. The individual text modules of the current definition were rated as “important” by at least 66.3 and at most 98 %, while the range for the Kyoto decision proposal was between 26.5 and 72.8 %. ICOM Switzerland realised an identical members’ survey with very similar results. There was no international response due to lack of participation: ICOFOM received only 13 submissions apart from ICOM Germany’s report.<sup>6</sup>

In parallel, the German organisation of public museum advisory bodies (KMBL) was informed about the definition process and asked for a statement. These advisory bodies accompany renewal processes in museums and influence state funding for museums; they prepare expert opinions on museum projects (or on non-museums) in various contexts. The KMBL expressed a conservative opinion: the current ICOM museum definition “*is in its short form precise and generally understandable for the public, sponsors, funders and museum stakeholders. The standards for practical museum work can be derived from this. KMBL is open to an adaptation and further development of the definition, as long*

*as it can be clearly distinguished from a mission statement.*”<sup>7</sup>

Together with ICOM Europe and ICOFOM, ICOM Germany was a cooperation partner of the *Journée des Comités 2020* initiated by ICOM France. This bilingual event, held on 10 March 2020 at the Muséum nationale de l’Histoire naturelle, Paris, aimed to promote the international exchange of ideas on museum definition. 41 committees participated through sent-in media or personal representations, and ICOM France subsequently published all the conference papers.<sup>8</sup> As a result of the *Journée des Comités 2020*, recommendations were presented to the Executive Committee and Board on 23 April 2020. These required that there be at least two definition proposals and that the committees be given twelve months to form an opinion before making a decision, e.g. by consulting their members.

As a continuation of the communication with the members of ICOM Germany, it was planned to follow up a conference on 20 March 2020 with a members’ forum. Due to the restrictions of the COVID pandemic, the members’ forum was cancelled at short notice and held online on 18 June 2020; around eighty members took part. Three subgroups discussed the definition work and reported in the final plenary. The planning of the members’ forum was based on guidelines from December 2019. The then President of ICOM International had invited all

ICOM committees to send in new definition proposals in the course of 2020.

### New agenda, new activism

On 10 December 2020, the new agenda was presented, now all ICOM’s constituent units were to develop the vocabulary of the definition in multiple consultations with their members. Shortly afterwards, on 21 December 2020, the second open letter reached ICOM Germany. It achieved 210 signatures (199 from Germany)<sup>9</sup> and demanded “*open discussion spaces for a long overdue new museum definition*” and “*a democratic and transparent discussion about the upcoming new socio-political and social demands on museums*”. In contrast to the first, the second open letter was anonymous. When asked via the website’s contact form, the initiator described herself or himself as an “*initiative that claims to represent the breadth of society and museum discourse. We therefore act exclusively as a group and anonymously, in order to correspond to the necessarily society-wide discussion about a new museum definition also in our structure*”. On its website, ICOM Germany expressed its surprise that a group that claims to consist of museum professionals wants to lead a discussion but does not want to be recognised in the process.

For “Consultation 1” of the new international agenda, ICOM Germany sent in the evaluation report of the 2019 member survey. The submission of twenty key terms or key concepts requested in “Consultation 2” suggested a second members’ forum. What was meant by key concepts remained undefined. An additional

6 GUIRAGOSSIAN, Olivia and Marion BERTIN. ICOFOM survey on the new museum definition. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 2020, vol. 48, no. 2, p. 275.

7 FREISE, Oliver and Hans LOCHMANN. Konferenz der öffentlichen Museumsberatung. Tagung 2020 in der Welterbestadt Quedlinburg. *Museumszeit. Mitteilungsblatt* [Museumsverband Niedersachsen und Bremen e.V.] 2020, no. 77, p. 37.

8 RAOUL-DUVAL, Juliette (ed.). *What definition do museums need? Proceedings of the ICOM committees’ day. Paris, Grande galerie de l’évolution (MNHN), March 10, 2020* [online]. Paris: ICOM France, 2020 [accessed 2022-01-31]. Available from www: <<https://www.icom-musees.fr/ressources/what-definition-do-museums-need>>.

9 *OpenPetition* [online]. [accessed 2022-01-31]. Available from www: <<https://www.openpetition.de/petition/unterzeichner/icom-change#petition-main>>.



20 key concepts of ICOM Germany:	20 isolated terms out of the 20 key concepts:	key words of the Young Professionals Network:
information and documentation facility	Documentation	
cultural institution	Culture	
collection-centred institution	Collections	
a part of the research infrastructure	research*; science*	research*
an instrument of science communication	science*; communication*	
non-profit		
conserving / preserving <sup>1</sup>	Preserves	Preserve
researching <sup>1</sup>	[investigates]; research*	research*
exhibiting <sup>1</sup>	Presents	Exhibit
		Curate
mediating / interpreting / communicating <sup>1</sup>	interprets; communication*	
		educate*
		Impart
handing down to posterity <sup>1</sup>		
		enable analogue and digital accesses
tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment <sup>2</sup>	heritage*; humanity; environment	
material natural and cultural heritage <sup>2</sup>	material; nature*; culture*; heritage*	
evidence (documents) of nature and culture <sup>2</sup>	nature*; culture*	
in the service of society	Society	
in the service of future generations	Future	
open to the public	Public	
for the purpose of education		educate*
for the purpose of study	Studies	
	Learning	
as an agency of knowledge		
<i>Marked terms<sup>1</sup> are grammatically connected with marked terms<sup>2</sup> like predicate and object.</i>		<i>The other proposed terms do not have an analogy in the parallel lists.</i>

Tab. 1: Methodological-analytical differences in key concepts and terms

problem was that the ICOFOM survey of 2019 already asked for key concepts; consequently, there could be no contradictions with the member survey of 2019. Therefore, the twenty highest-rated text elements were taken from it and shortened to twenty key words. The basic idea was that individual words can be connected to different schools of thought in the museum sector and can therefore be broadly consensual. In a preliminary online

survey, the members were able to assess this approach; 82 % agreed.

The online members' forum on 24 March 2021 linked different perspectives. Among other contributions, the “*Young Professionals Network*” presented its own twenty key concepts. More than half of this list evidenced certain intellectual attitudes in museum work (handle collections critically; reduce

barriers; sustainable; critical to/of discrimination; transparent; divers; multi-perspective; self-reflective; inclusive; willingness to change; related to the present; participation; taking a postcolonial perspective). In the closing plenary it became clear that the list of words proposed by the board of ICOM Germany was disliked, without any alternative being favoured. In the follow-up, the board decided that not the criticised twenty words but

their starting point, the broadly accepted key concepts from the 2019 membership survey, would be submitted.

The final procedural steps provoked another public protest. On 15 June 2021, 22 museum professionals, including several directors of renowned museums and two former presidents of ICOM Germany, published a “plea for an essential museum definition of the world association ICOM”. The first two principles are: “*The ICOM museum definition must name the unchanging core tasks of the museum: collecting, preserving, researching, presenting and communicating. 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.*”<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 (see page 51) illustrates the methodological-analytical differences at this stage of development. It compares the key concepts with the highest approval ratings in 2019 with the terms selected as a discussion impulse for the 2021 members’ forum and the terms developed by the Young Professionals Network. It becomes clear that reducing concepts to terms opens up indeterminacies. Several terms can be placed in different contexts of meaning (marked with an asterisk \* in the table). In addition, essential museological ideas disappear from view.

ICOM International’s subsequent analysis switched to considering only individual words, so that ICOM Germany’s submission went

through the same editing process at international level that had previously failed in Germany. At the author’s request, the ICOM Define Co-Chairs explained that the disaggregation of wording was done according to the rationale presented in the “Consultation 2” submissions. They also referred to “*the need of ICOM Define to know which terms are desired by committees to be concluded in a proposed museum definition*”.<sup>11</sup>

For “Consultation 3”, ICOM Germany decided to submit the selection lists of ICOM Define to the members unchanged as an online survey. It was accessible until 15 September 2021 and yielded 322 valid contributions. Analogous to the template, the individual words were assigned to umbrella terms. As in the global survey, these umbrella terms were not open for evaluation.

The international requirement that a certain number of terms could be entered per category (umbrella term) meant that terms with significantly lower approval ratings were nevertheless listed. The following table uses the umbrella terms specified by ICOM Define and compares the twenty key concepts identified by ICOM Germany on the basis of the 2019 member survey with the terms favoured in Germany in 2021 – the submitted terms in normal font, the terms not submitted crossed out. The degree of approval from the respective survey is given in brackets.

Only a few statements were rated similarly in both surveys (“open to the public”; “researching”), even the much-cited core functions of museums suffered losses. If the placement in the context of the current or also the pre-

2007 museum definition was recognisable, the appreciation was mostly greater than it was the case with isolated terms. The special German opinion was reflected in the fact that in the worldwide evaluation, only in one category did all the terms fall short of the quorum of 66.6 % required for changes to ICOM’s statutes (“experience”); in Germany, this was also the case for “social values”.

### Impressions at the halfway point of the second definition process

The suppression of key concepts and the introduction of obligatory umbrella terms had a lasting effect on the response behaviour of the members of ICOM Germany. Since the option of shaping the definition via a *genus proximum* was not offered, many formulations valued in Germany were no longer available for choice. The decomposition of “concepts” into individual words apparently led to the situation that words that were only familiar in a certain constellation received few votes, whereas the constellation had previously been highly valued (e.g. “evidence / documents of nature and culture”). Words that only concern a minority of museums disappeared from the vocabulary (“nature”), while the breakdown into word groups under umbrella terms placed words as generally accepted that received only moderate approval (e.g. in the German “expertise”, 32 %; in the international result “discovery / curiosity”, 35 %). For a definition text, it is to be expected that mentioning terms under several umbrella terms is excluded; if the given set of terms per umbrella term remains the same, even fewer accepted terms move up (e.g. in

<sup>10</sup> Plädoyer für eine essenzielle Museumsdefinition des Weltverbands ICOM. In *Embassy of Culture* [online]. 15 June 2021 [accessed 2022-01-31]. Available from [www: <https://embassy-of-culture.com/project/mp4md\\_icom/>](https://embassy-of-culture.com/project/mp4md_icom/).

<sup>11</sup> BONILLA-MERCHAV, Laurant and Bruno BRULON SOARES. E-mail to the author. 28 July 2021.

20 key concepts of ICOM Germany:	German contribution to "Consultation 3":
<b>the entity:</b>	
<b>institution</b> (67 %)	institution (67 %)
information and documentation facility (87 %)	
cultural institution (83 %)	
collection-centred institution (81 %)	
a part of the research infrastructure (87 %)	
an instrument of science communication (82 %)	
<b>the entity qualifier:</b>	
non-profit (68 %)	non-profit (44 %)
open to the public* (98 %)	open to the public* (80 %)
	professional (48 %)
<b>permanent</b> (75 %)	permanent (44 %)
	expertise (32 %)
<b>the key functions:</b>	
	collects (71 %)
conserving/preserving (95 %)	preserves (54 %); conserves (48 %)
researching (93 %)	researches (83 %)
exhibiting (95 %)	displays/exhibits (79 %)
mediating (98 %)	communicates (45 %); interprets (23 %)
	educates* (63 %)
handing down to posterity (86 %)	
<b>the museum's objects/subjects:</b>	
tangible (96 %) and intangible (80 %) heritage of humanity and its environment	tangible and intangible (33 %); heritage* (67 %); environment (2 %)
material natural and cultural heritage (93 %)	nature/natural (10 %); culture/cultural (53 %); heritage* (67 %)
evidence (documents) of nature and culture (86 %)	evidence/documents (17 %)
	collection (52 %); knowledge* (44 %); memory (40 %)
<b>experiences/targets:</b>	
as an agency of knowledge (78 %)	knowledge* (49 %)
	reflection (49 %)
for the purpose of education (95 %)	education* (42 %)
for the purpose of study (82 %)	
	inspiration (41 %)
enjoyment (68 %)	enjoyment/entertainment (37 %)
<b>social values:</b>	
in the service of society (91 %)	service to society (54 %)
	respect (49 %)
	diversity (46 %)
	accessibility (45 %)
	sustainability (41 %)
	authenticity (40 %)
<b>target &amp; relationship:</b>	
in the service of future generations (71 %)	
open to the public* (98 %)	open to the public* (90 %)
	community/society (70 %)
	audience/visitors (61 %)
	humanity (36 %)

Tab. 2: ICOM Germany key concepts and German contribution to "Consultation 3"

the international result “learning”, 25 %).<sup>12</sup>

The international as well as the German lists of terms are not entirely plausible: collections cannot be collected, knowledge cannot be restored, memory can perhaps be educated, but not exhibited. If the process had already ended with “Consultation 3” and only those terms were used in the ICOM museum definition that achieved the ICOM-typical quorum of at least 66.6 % internationally, the definition (excluding duplicate uses of terms) would read: “A museum is an inclusive and accessible institution open to the public that researches and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage and uses it for education in the service of society / community / the public.”

Accepting the umbrella terms established by ICOM Define, and assuming that the maximum set of terms per category specified in “Consultation 3” expresses a design intent of ICOM Define, the definition would read: “A museum is a permanent, professional, socially responsible, non-profit institution open to the public, governed by inclusivity, accessibility, sustainability, diversity, authenticity and ethics, which collects, conserves, researches, exhibits and communicates knowledge / tangible and intangible cultural heritage / memory, and uses this for education in the service of society / community / public / museum audience / active participants to enable enjoyment, reflection, discovery, experience and learning.”

Not only the deviations from the discussion results within ICOM Germany, but obvious

contradictions in these constructed texts and contrasts to traditional museum practice show that there is still much textual work to be done. A particular problem is hidden in the fact that “Consultation 3” asked not only about appreciation of terms, but also about legal or bureaucratic difficulties in using each term. However, these difficulties cannot be agreed upon by the majority. A single vote is sufficient to name these obstacles (if that vote has sufficient legal expertise).

Regardless of the outcome, the overlong preoccupation with the ICOM museum definition has brought about considerable changes in ICOM Germany. On this occasion, the first ever online member survey took place in 2019, and by 2021 this process seemed almost commonplace. The topic of the museum definition was used by outsiders as a vehicle to call for more activity from ICOM Germany. Among the members, differences of opinion emerged publicly for the first time in the form of informal groupings. The board felt compelled to clarify the association’s relationship with the “Young Professionals Network”.

In 2019, the German Museums Association, the KMBL and ICOM Germany jointly began updating the German document “Standards for Museums”. It was first published in 2006 and derived from the ICOM museum definition; it serves as a benchmark in museum consulting, but also in the certifications of museums for regional “seals of quality”. In the event that the revision of the ICOM museum definition takes longer than the work on the standards, it was agreed to use the 2007 text version, which will survive as the UNESCO museum definition,<sup>13</sup> as

a basis. Perhaps the relevance of the ICOM museum definition has already passed its peak?

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Seminář Nová definice muzea aneb její klady a zápory (Technické muzeum v Brně, březen 2022)/Colloquium New definition of the museum: its pros and cons. Foto/Photo: Technické muzeum v Brně/Technical Museum in Brno.



# NOVÁ DEFINICE MUZEA ANEB JEJÍ KLADY A ZÁPORY

Sborník přednášek  
ze stejnojmenné konference

# NEW DEFINITION OF THE MUSEUM: ITS PROS AND CONS

Proceedings of the conference

Jan Dolák – Josef Večeřa (eds.):

**NOVÁ DEFINICE MUZEA ANEB JEJÍ KLADY A ZÁPORY. SBORNÍK PŘEDNÁŠEK ZE STEJNOJMENNÉ KONFERENCE. BRNO: TECHNICKÉ MUZEUM V BRNĚ, 2022. ISBN 978-80-7685-010-1**

Technické muzeum v Brně při příležitosti konání generální konference ICOM 2022 v Praze vydává publikaci Nová definice muzea: její klady a zápory. Sborník ze stejnojmenné konference, která proběhla v březnu 2022 v Technickém muzeu v Brně, obsahuje příspěvky a polemiky českých a slovenských muzeologů na téma, co je, či není muzeum a jaké pojmy by se měly v nové definici muzea objevit. Publikace připravená v české i anglické jazykové mutaci přináší deset statí, které mají být nápomocny při tvorbě nové definice, o níž by se mělo na celosvětové konferenci jednat. Autoři operují s pojmy, jako jsou například sbírky, udržitelnost, přístupnost či inkluzivita a zvažují, zda vhodně popisují to, čím muzeum opravdu je.

Tištěný sborník v češtině lze zakoupit na pokladně TMB nebo objednat jeho zaslání poštou na kontaktech:

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Jan Dolák – Josef Večeřa (eds.):

**NEW DEFINITION OF THE MUSEUM: ITS PROS AND CONS PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD ON 7TH–8TH MARCH 2022 IN THE TECHNICAL MUSEUM IN BRNO.**

The anthology New Definition of the Museum: Its Pros and Cons contains contributions and disputations by Czech and Slovak museologists on the topic of what a museum is or is not and what terms should be included in the new definition. The papers were presented at the conference of the same name, which preceded the ICOM General Conference in Prague in 2022. They are ten articles that are intended to help create a new definition to be discussed at the global conference. The authors operate with terms such as collections, sustainability, accessibility and inclusiveness and consider whether they appropriately describe what the museum really is.

English version of the proceedings:

<https://www.tmbrno.cz/kategorie-produktu/e-books/>



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