

ICOM Russia recommendations for the elaboration of the new definition of “museum”

Reference

ICOM Russia took the following actions with the aim to discuss the necessity of changing the museum definition, which is fixed in the current ICOM documents (ICOM - Code of Ethics for Museums 2016):

- On 31 May 2018, in the framework of the International festival “Intermuseum-2018” ICOM Russia organized a Roundtable talks "What is the Museum Today?". During the event, Russian specialists tried to identify different points of view on the mission, goals and functions of museums nowadays. More than 120 people participated the roundtable. After the discussion, video and post-release were posted on ICOM Russia website and social media.
- ICOM Russia conducted an online survey (from 13 July to 6 August 2018) aimed at identifying attitudes of the museum community to existing definition of the term “museum”. 155 people participated in the research, 68% of them were museum workers, 9% - independent experts in museum sphere, 8 % - university lecturers engaged in museum studies, 5% - members of professional museum organizations / associations, 4% - students, 6% - people from other professional areas.
- ICOM Russia formed an Expert group, which included museum workers, representatives of the academic area, consultants and researchers in the field of museum studies. All recommendations for the elaboration of new museum definition are based on the results of the survey and discussions held during the Roundtable talks as well as developments the Expert group.

ICOM Russia recommends ICOM Standing Committee “Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials” to:

1. Consider a fact that in the framework of the survey among Russian specialists the majority of participants (63%) expressed the necessity to review the current museum definition. As a justification for this position, respondents noted the following main reasons: the definition is “outdated and does not reflect the new reality” (38%) *, “does not have sufficient links with practice” (16%), “far from the essence of museum work” (13%).
2. Notice that there are some phrases in the current definition of the concept "museum" which cause the great contradictions in the Russian museum community: *“a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution”*, *“service of society and its development”*, *“for the purposes of enjoyment”* (see Appendix 1)
3. Consider the possibility to define the “museum” as a “social institute”. This term carries a wide range of meanings and eliminates the need to introduce such clarifications as *“in the service of society and its development”* because the social institute is intrinsically created to meet the needs of society and its development. In addition, the social institute includes not only the agency itself but also certain values,

roles and norms related to its functioning as elements. Such approach is very important for the recognition of the specifics of museum work and strengthening the profession of museum worker.

4. While formulating the new definition, special attention should be paid to ensuring that the basic functions that have always defined the essence of museum activities preserved a central role. Today we are facing with the need to take into account the new realities and not to ignore changes taking place in the museum practice. However, it is important not to miss such activities as identification of the primary sources of knowledge and the most valuable part of the natural and cultural heritage, acquisition, preservation, study and display of collections, as well as educational activities. They should not be allowed to be secondary or blurred.

5. While elaborating the new definition of the museum, take into account new goals and objectives that museums perform nowadays. In the course of the ICOM Russia study, respondents highlighted the following museum functions:

- Making heritage relevant (actualization);
- Interpretation of heritage;
- Social inclusion/strengthening of social connections;
- Development of the participatory culture;
- Transmission of values shared by communities, groups or individuals;
- Promotion of cultural expression;
- Facilitation of the civil dialogue.

6. Exclude from the definition the word “entertainment” which in some cultures has negative connotations. Instead, consider embedding a concept of “emotional experience”. This phrase includes a wide range of feelings, which the visitor could experience in a museum. Different heritage objects can cause different reactions and the work with them is not always entertaining.

*The percentages of votes cast for these answers

Mark your opinion on the particular elements of the existing definition of the “museum” (choose one of the answer options for each wording)

