

**International Council of Museums**  
**ICOM UK AGM**  
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The current ICOM definition of a museum is ‘a non-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society’. Permanent institutions they may be, but museums operate within a rapidly changing social, technological, environmental, economic and political environment. It is this changing environment and its implications for museums which the current leadership of ICOM has been addressing over the last three years. This brief resume outlines some of the initiatives through which ICOM is leading a global conversation that recognises the developing role of museums in a changing world.

**Strategic planning:** A survey of national and international committees was conducted by the Strategic Planning Standing Committee (SPSC) in 2018. Asked to identify the most important issues facing museums today, the majority of respondents cited the decrease in public funding as a major concern. In many countries, the public spend on museums has been steadily declining over a period of time and this not only challenges the viability of maintaining the operations of museums to acceptable standards, it has a whole series of flow-on effects. The perilous state of maintenance in some museums and the catastrophic impact that this can have was evident in the fire at the National Museum of Brazil last September. In the light of the concerns about a sustainable funding future for museums, the respondents to the SPSC survey called upon ICOM to lead a museum-advocacy campaign based on a clear articulation of the value of museums that can be used to lobby governments across the globe.

**Definition:** As the sequel to the Working Group on Museum Definition formed in 2015, the ICOM Standing Committee on Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP) was established in 2017 to address the need for a museum definition ‘that is clear on the purposes of museums, and on the value base from which museums meet their sustainable, ethical, political, social and cultural challenges and responsibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ and which is ‘historicised, contextualised, de-naturalised and de-colonialised’. The MDPP has implemented a participative process that has engaged a broad, international cross-section of ICOM members, academics and other relevant parties through Round Tables and other forms of discussion. It will report to the plenary at the Triennial ICOM conference in Kyoto in September 2019.

**Sustainability:** ICOM established a working group on Sustainability in September 2018 with the purpose of advising ICOM on how to implement and mainstream the principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. The working group is tasked with recommending environmental best-practice for museum operations as well as advising how museums can fulfil their role as public educators working with communities to achieve collective environmental goals.

**Decolonisation:** In December 2018, ICOM launched a project on decolonising museums. The aim is to facilitate a global conversation to clarify the meaning and address the many aspects of decolonisation. These include challenging and de-centring the perspectives of dominant cultural groups, sharing authority for interpretation, critically investigating the selection of objects, text and exhibitions and creating frameworks for repatriation and restitution of cultural material and human remains.

**Disaster and Risk Management:** The vulnerability of cultural heritage through natural disasters (Italy and Nepal), armed conflict (Iraq and Syria) and catastrophic fires such as those which occurred at the National Museum of Brazil and Notre Dame highlights the need for planning in risk management and rescue operations. This is the work of the Disaster and Risk Management Standing Committee of ICOM which is dedicated to emergency response for museums. DRMC works with museum-related professionals across the world to monitor cultural heritage emergencies and provide advice and assistance to colleagues and their institutions upon request. DRMC will present sessions at the 2019 Kyoto Triennial conference.

**Countering Illicit Trade in Cultural Goods:** The looting of cultural artefacts has emerged as a major heritage issue in areas of the world where there is armed conflict. ICOM is a world leader in the fight to end the illicit trade in cultural goods through its publication of Red Lists which are used by law enforcement agencies throughout the world. The Red Lists classify endangered categories of archaeological objects and works of art in the most vulnerable areas of the world, in order to prevent them from being sold or illegally exported. In cooperation with the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Red List on Yemen was launched at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018. The International Observatory on Illicit Trade in Cultural Goods is another ICOM initiative which provides both a platform for the collection and dissemination of information about activity in illicit traffic and ways to prevent it and a forum for annual meeting of key partners.

**Museums and Society:** ICOM recognises the increasing focus on the social role of museums and the public value that they create for the people and communities they serve. In 2018, ICOM created a section within the Secretariat to focus on 'Museums and Society'. The aims of the program are (a) to help museums identify and address new societal trends and needs (b) to strengthen ICOM's expertise and visibility on topics related to museums and society (c) to advocate and raise awareness on the impact of museums in society and (d) to research and disseminate information on models of best practice. In the same year, ICOM and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) published the Guide for Local Governments, Communities and Museums: maximising the impact.

**Diversity:** Greater membership diversification was another outcome from the SPSC survey with calls to encourage a more-intergenerational membership and one where more category 3 and 4 countries are represented. Reflecting its global remit and commitment to diversity, the 2019 ICOM Triennial conference is meeting in Kyoto, Japan from the 1-7 September this year. When the early bird registration for Kyoto closed last month, the conference had already received 1500 registrations. We hope to see many delegates from UK museums in Kyoto this September.