



ICOM Kyoto 2019 Programme

Discussion on the museum definition

Olga Van Oost

1. ICOM museum definition is a cornerstone of national museum and heritage policies

“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.” (ICOM, 2007)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' BOB DYLAN

THE LARGEST STATE OF GULF COAST
BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE BAHAMAS.
TWO THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED EIGHTY
MILES IN LENGTH AND TWENTY-EIGHT
THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED EIGHTY
MILES IN BREADTH.

2. Last decade: growing consensus that museum definition needed revision

- High focus on objects
- Inward-looking museum perspective
- Too static
- Tangible and intangible heritage
- Museums are not ‘storages of objects’; museums are ‘public’ institutions with active roles in societies (‘agents of change’)

3. ICOM appointed *Museum Definition Prospects and Potentials Committee* (MDPP)

- Lead: Jette Sandahl, Danish Museologist
- Team: experts
- Set up a participatory trajectory to explore alternatives to the museum definition of 2007

Museum Definition

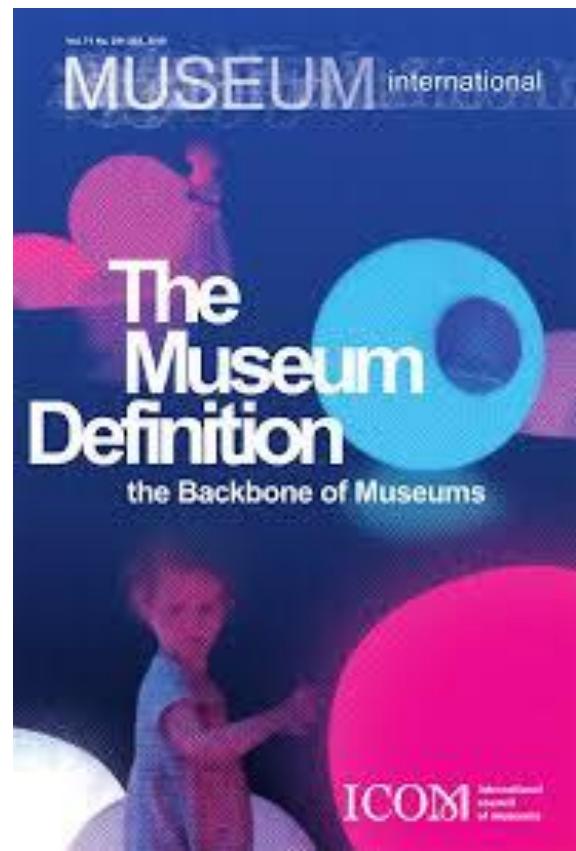
with Jette Sandahl

Chair of the ICOM Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials

“

The importance of a ***museum definition***
is that it functions as a shared
framework for museums across the
world – which is itself quite miraculous.

Jette Sandahl, Chair of the Committee for
Museum Definition, Prospects and
Potentials (MDPP)



4. Methodology

- Round-table discussions: number, results?
- Call to send in suggestions to ICOM-website: 269 submissions, representative?
- Participatory? Not really
- Credibility? Low

5. Proposal of a new museum definition

“Museums are democratising, inclusive and poly- phonic 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 wellbeing.”

6. The game was on: International ICOM community on Fire!



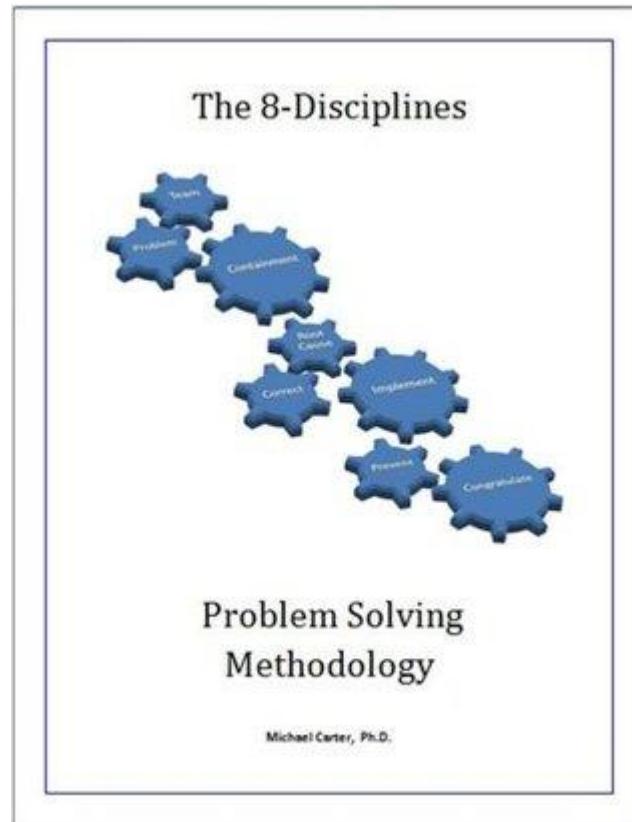
6.1. Only an English version



6.2. Only six weeks to discuss the proposal



6.3. Methodological issues



6.4. Only 1 proposal



6.5. Museum ‘definition’ or ‘mission statement’ ???



def·i·ni·tion

/ defə|niSH(ə)n /

noun: a statement of the exact meaning of a word.

Proposal of a new museum definition

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7. Conclusion in Kyoto: we voted NOT to vote



7. What's next?

ICOM Belgium should prepare a shared view on the museum definition

In Flanders we have done research in the past:
<https://faro.be/blogs/olga-van-oost/vlaamse-delegatie-op-icom-congres-kyoto>

Set up survey/focus groups to hear YOU!



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