

A basis for discussion from the Young Professionals Network of ICOM Germany for the development of the museum definition

March 24th, 2021

The Young Professionals Network of ICOM Germany is a transdisciplinary network of students and doctoral candidates of museum-related subjects as well as scientific trainees, and young professionals who have been working for museums and comparable institutions for less than five years.

In order to participate constructively in the process of further developing the museum definition, about ten members of the network, during 4 weeks, developed a basis for discussion with 20 key words and explaining phrases. The aim of our initiative was to discuss the contents of a worldwide museum definition and to enter into an exchange with the members and the board of ICOM Germany on the basis of our results.

Development process: from the first idea to the final keywords

First, all members of the Young Professionals network were invited to collect key words and appropriate explanations, which, for them, seem to be important for a museum definition. Thus, a list of 37 keywords emerged. Those terms were clustered by the active group to seven different topics - for example "participation" or "innovation".

The next step was to select and discuss words and explanations: Are there substantial doublings? Which terms can be summarized in one? Do any explanations need to be specified?

Thus, the members of the Young Professionals generated 20 out of the 37 key words. These were assigned to three categories that could form a basis for a possible outline of the redefinition for ICOM Germany.

A general consent of all network members was enquired via an intern poll on the resulting 20 key words. Finally, representatives of the Young Professionals presented the keywords and the design process during the ICOM Germany Member's Meeting on the development of the museum definition on 24th March 2021.

Tasks (What do museums do?)	
Keywords	Explanations
exhibit	Museums present both collected and (co-)created exhibits.
research	In compliance with scientific standards, museums contribute to the search of knowledge.
impart	Museums share knowledge and skills or serve as a platform for transmission. They keep the communication on a level that is accessible and comprehensible for a preferably large group. This means that they reduce bandwidth and clearly illustrate contents and contexts.
educate	Museums provide the facilities to upgrade one's knowledge and encourage formal and informal, self-determined learning.

handle collections critically	Museums handle existing and new collections in a self-reflective, diversity-oriented and transparent way. Extending or deaccessioning the collections are always considered.
preserve	One purpose of museums is to conserve tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage. Thus, it is also kept accessible for future generations.
curate	Following a selective process, museums arrange objects and information in a multi-perspective way.
reduce barriers	Museums are public places that are supposed to enable equal accessibility for all. For this purpose, various barriers are actively removed in order to create the simplest possible physical (on-site and/or digital), sensorical, social, financial, content-related and linguistic access for everyone.
enable analogue and digital accesses	Museums ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. public and equal access for local and global societies. 2. public and equal access for societies around the world through digital provision of museum content and offers.

Herangehensweise an die Aufgaben (WIE?) Approach to the tasks (How do museums do that?)	
Keywords	Explanations
sustainable	Museum buildings, ways of working and acting as well as exhibition programs of museums are questioned with regard to their consequences for social, ecological and economic developments. As a result, museums design responsibly and resource-efficiently.
critical to/of discrimination	Museums reflect on their actions and impact regarding all dimensions of discrimination and avoid those the best they can. They hereby take into account discrimination on grounds of age, class, ethnicity, gender, ableism, religion and sexual orientation. They take into consideration their impact on society.
transparent	Museums reveal structures, responsibilities and processes and make them comprehensible for all stakeholders and prospects.
divers	Museums encourage plurality and heterogeneity among partners, audiences, personnel and programming.
multi-perspective	Museums reflect their perspective, discuss ignorance and promote multiperspective work with diverse partners. In doing so, they recognize that neutral observation, mediation, collection and research are not possible.
self-reflective	Museums analyze and question their own actions, structure, history and responsibility. Thereby they develop a consciousness for the status quo and their own objections.
inclusive	Everybody is invited to participate in museum actions.

Further goals of museums

Keywords	Explanations
willingness to change	Museums strive for innovation and are ready to implement changes on the content, conceptual and organizational level, especially with regard to the implementation of innovative technologies, communication methods and organizational structures.
related to the present	Museums take on contemporary debates, they research them and prepare them for the public in a differentiated way, taking a stand on them.
participation	Museums enable all people to actively participate and contribute to museum processes. Museums thus become places of exchange from which all sides can benefit.
Taking a postcolonial perspective	Museums take a critical look at racist and discriminatory thought patterns and narratives that arose in the course of European colonialism.