



Contemporary Collecting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visiting the hairdressing salon in Espoo, Finland.

Photo Espoo City Museum, Leena Sipponen

Letter from the Chair

Danielle Kuijten

Dear members,

First of all, I want to speak some words to you, in this surreal time many are faced with a diversity of challenges, both professional and personal. We cannot see these separately as they shape who we are and how we cope. Therefore I hope you, your families and friends are all safe and healthy, and that you find support both with those close to you but also with your colleagues worldwide.

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During the past months as we all had to deal with regulations to help fight the virus, one of the commonalities was that most of us were confined in our homes and our institutes were faced with a long absence of visitors. Still the situations differ from country to country, region to region. Many first needed to come to terms with working from home. Some were dealing with partners and children also being home. From here we started to look at our institutions and to act in order to stay visible for and to serve our visitors, although now doing this online. Followed by a phase where we see some institutions diving deeper into what it means to have an empty building while your audience is at home. What could we learn from this, from the behaviour of people, and translate to things we could do as institutions now but also in the future? In this journey we gathered a huge amount of experiences online, experimented with educational formats, stepped up to take on different roles to serve local needs and we started to collect the pandemic. But not all of us got the space to experiment. We also saw cuts in staff and uncertainties about whether institutions would survive for the future.

If already the pandemic showed the inequalities and inequities within our societies, the Black Lives Matter protest movement in this period highlighted this even more. The protests spread all over the world in a short time, resulting in protests in many cities with large numbers of people bringing it onto the streets. As a result these actions also pushed long heard discussions about representation and belonging into the forefront of discussion. Statues have literally fallen from their pedestals.

As collections people what can we do and what can we learn from actions such as collecting the pandemic, collecting protests? What to do with the statues that have been removed? Which roles do we see for ourselves as museums curators? What ethical questions do we ask ourselves?

We are pleased to share with you our latest newsletter that touches upon some of these issues. Alina Gromova reports on the discussion ICOM Germany had on the museum definition earlier this year. We wrote an editorial on collecting the pandemic and have a report on the Conference "What's Missing? Collecting and Exhibiting Europe" by Laurie Cosmo. Lastly we also did a short members survey at the beginning of the year which we would like to share after you. This newsletter and its content was written before the current critical situation in the leadership of ICOM. The COMCOL board will proceed the discussions with the boards of the other committees (national and international)



to get clarity on what has happened and will keep you informed through email and our facebook page.

Best wishes to all of you as we attempt to resume our 'normal' professional and personal lives'

Danielle Kuijten
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Opening lecture by Suay Aksoy,
President of ICOM
Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug

Conference Review

“What’s Missing? Collecting and Exhibiting Europe”

*Held at Museum
Europäischer Kulturen
- Staatliche Museen zu
Berlin*

26 - 28 June 2019

Laurie Kalb Cosmo

The Museum Europäischer Kulturen - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (MEK), housed in the Berlin Dahlem Museum Center since 2011, turned 20 in June 2019. It celebrated in grand style by hosting a two-day international conference from 26 - 28 June titled

“What’s Missing? Collecting and Exhibiting Europe.” Conference organisers, led by MEK Director Dr. Elisabeth Tietmeyer and MEK Deputy Director Dr. Iris Edenheiser, focused on “blank spots,” which they described as “objects, narratives, methods and actors that have not been paid any (or enough) attention in museum reflections on contemporary lives and societies in Europe.” Conference presenters included museum curators and directors, journalists, a visual artist, and ethnologists and anthropologists working throughout Europe, North America and Japan. The museums with which they work ranged in type from what the organizers called “historical folklore, national and sometimes ethnically oriented to contemporary, European and transculturally designed institutions.” Considering that these institutions are undergoing transformations at the same time that the multicultural “European project” is increasingly called into question, conference organisers asked what social role such museums, especially those they called “former” folklife museums, wish to play amidst conflicting ideas about European identity and cultural heritage. Assuming that contemporary museums and collections of everyday life must embrace social action, organisers sought to address ways that collections and exhibitions could be reinterpreted through lenses of the marginalized, including post migratory, queer, post colonial, fugitive, disabled and other individuals and groups.

Fifteen papers were delivered under four themes: “Global Europe,” “Towards the Transformation of Collections of Everyday Culture,” “Methods and Structures,” and “Exhibiting Europe.” Additional panels included a conversation on diversity and social justice between well-known journalist and refugee advocate Ferda Ataman of Berlin and Dr. Susan Kamel, Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Applied Sciences



Evening reception

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug

Berlin, and on a “One-Stop-Shop Archive of Forgotten Memories”, an initiative of the EU Horizon 2020 project called POEM (Participatory Memory Practices), which addresses strategies for envisioning socially inclusive futures for Europe. Drs. Inge Zwart (University of Uppsala), Franziska Mucha (University of Glasgow) and Susanne Boersma (University of Hamburg/MEK) presented the project’s central questions and invited conference participants to actively take part — to create a drawing or text of a memory they wished to forget; attendees responded enthusiastically. The MEK offered optional tours of its permanent exhibition “Cultural Contacts: Living in Europe”, a queer tour of the museum, and two temporary exhibitions “100 Percent Wool” or “Wedding Dreams”. Dr. Suay Aksoy, President of ICOM (International Council of Museums), opened the conference with a keynote lecture “What’s Missing: Sticking to the Margins,” in which she focused on the value of museums as among the most trusted institutions in the world, and how, referring to UNESCO and ICOM mandates, they have the responsibility and power to establish dialogue between cultures and build bridges for a peaceful world. Dr. Sharon Macdonald, Professor in Social Anthropology at Humboldt University, Berlin, renowned scholar of difficult heritage, and founder of the university’s Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH), offered reflections and a final discussion.

The international prominence of the speakers emphasised the conference’s importance, not only as a birthday milestone for The Museum Europäischer Kulturen but as a historical moment of transition for all European museums that represent the cultures of everyday life.



Opening of the conference

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug

An underlying theme of all the conference papers, no matter what panel they were in, was the tension between absence and belonging: in terms of collections that need a museum home, marginalised communities that require a museum voice, or historic collections that no longer belong to their settings. A few examples from the papers that addressed these themes are offered here. Regarding collections in search of a museum home, Dr. Erica Lehrer, Professor of History and Social Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, presented “Awkward Objects of Genocide,” an investigation of vernacular woodcarvings representing the Holocaust made by non-professional Polish artists, which was part of the EU Horizon 2020 grant TRACES (Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts). Lehrer described the “awkward” status of these objects in museums, where folk art typically is unconnected to history or difficult subjects. In another paper “The Impossibility of ‘Blank Spot Europe’” with Dr. Anna Schmid, Director of Museum der Kulturen Basel (from 1994 to 1996 called Museum of Ethnology and Swiss Museum for Folk Culture), emphasised how Europe, or “the idea of Europe,” must be part of the material inventory of ethnography museums, especially because Europe as a point of view is always there, even if not explicitly acknowledged. Schmid discussed her exhibition “Migration: Moving the World,” which showcased migratory processes from different places in the world, including Europe, from the 16th century onward, by personifying actual objects from the museum’s collections as migrants without documents. Gerald McMaster, internationally-recognised curator, artist and professor of Indigenous Visual Culture and Curatorial Practice at OCAD University, Toronto spoke on “Re/presenting the European,” describing how colonial-era indigenous representations of Europeans as the “other” remain buried in European museum collections and by examining such works through an indigenous lens further analysis can be made of the representation of otherness today. McMaster’s approach aligns closely with that of Dr. Wayne Modest, Head of the Research Centre for Material Culture at the Tropenmuseum, Museum Volkenkunde, Africa Museum and Wereldmuseum, Netherlands, who in a new co-edited publication *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*, states, “Of ethnographic museums we can ask how we might think other futures out of the irreparable evil that colonialism represents. And, moreover, how these museums might help us rethink European futures as more equitable.”

Collaborating with museums and heritage organizations, Dr. Richard Sandell, Professor in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester and co-director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), gives a strong voice to marginalised communities in seemingly unlikely locations. In a fascinating presentation, Sandell described the award-winning Prejudice and Pride Programme (2017-2018) that RCMG created with the British National Trust and a series of installations called “Exile” at Kingston Lacy Country House and Estate in rural Dorset, based on the experiences of owner William John Banks (1786-1855) who was forced into exile for his homosexuality. In one installation, in the house’s entrance hall, 51 gallows ropes were suspended from the ceiling as a tribute to 51 men who were hanged under laws that criminalised same-sex acts during Banks’ lifetime.

Unlike historic house museums, where the building often forms the basis of existence for the museum, the foundation of European folk and ethnological museums is the object collection itself. However, as the conference organisers clearly state, historic folk and ethnological collections no longer reflect current social developments or complex pasts. This was among the most compelling themes of the conference. What about the afterlife of folk art collections? Do museums jettison historic handmade objects in favour of exhibitions focusing on current social issues, or do they problematize or try to

integrate them into narratives of more contemporary realities, as Dr. Schmid has done at the Museum der Kulturen Basel? In his paper “Collecting Contemporary Items to Study and Exhibit Social Issues: Experiences of the MuCEM, Marseille, France,” Dr. Denis Chevallier, Director of Research and Training at MuCEM (Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée), described how he introduced recent fieldwork and novel topics to two exhibitions “At the Bazaar of Gender” (2013) and “Junk, an Economy of Waste” (2014). The exhibition on Junk, which I saw with my students, was particularly effective, through the use of digital media and objects, in showcasing the global circuits that garbage makes throughout the Mediterranean, in terms of its creation, re-use and ultimate disposal. Chevallier’s novel exhibition approach is of particular interest, because he participated in the transformation and relocation of the famous NMATP (Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires) from Paris to the soaring new building in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille that became MuCEM. Chevallier’s exhibitions and those of other MuCEM curators make little or no use of the vast store of folk and ethnological objects acquired by the former NMATP now stored in a state-of-the-art offsite building a few kilometres away. However, these historic objects have stories to tell and cannot be rendered obsolete. Matthias Beitzl, Director of the Volkskundemuseum Wien, in his presentation “Collecting=Communicating” openly decried



Guided tour through the exhibition “100 Percent Wool”

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug



Conference programme

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug

the disconnect between the museum's historic folk art collections exhibited in its Baroque palace and the museum concept of 21st century European ethnological research. Unlike the MuCEM, the Volkskundemuseum Wien displays its 19th and 20th century collection, including painted wooden furniture, religious icons, clothing, paintings, and transport items, such as sleds. But interspersed with the permanent collection, the Volkskundemuseum showcases other objects that reflect recent experiences of newcomers to Vienna,

those who perhaps come under duress from Syria and other hot spots outside of Europe. In this way, the museum questions ideas of citizenship and who the museum is for. In a particularly affecting display of a Tyrolean farmhouse parlour as a period room, a video installation called "The Shores of Austria" is screened where the parlour windows should be. The video is actually a clip from a Sea-watch effort to rescue refugee boats in distress. In this installation, the parlour, a symbol of rural stability and safety, becomes wobbly in the context of international waters and the newcomers it brings.

In her paper "Current Dilemmas of Ethnographic Museums", Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz, Senior Curator of the Sweeten Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, also described the disconnect between her museum's 19th and early 20th century ethnographic collections and the present and her efforts to translate them into the language of today. With a focus on acquisitions and community participation, Oleszkiewicz described two projects: one in which private individuals were invited to donate contemporary items related to their experiences of school for the purpose of updating a small historic collection of wooden school bags, slate tablets and an inkwell, and another titled "Weddings 21," which focused on five wedding couples, whose 21st century social realities and marriage preparations were documented for an exhibition and their matrimonial effects added to the museum's earlier wedding

Panel discussion

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug





Part of the audience

Photo Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen / Christian Krug

collections. Despite pushback from ministerial funders, who argued that new acquisitions for an ethnographic museum needed to be historic, objects related to the 21st century weddings were ultimately added to the museum's permanent collection.

Back to the title of the MEK Conference, "What's Missing? Collecting and Exhibiting Europe." I found myself asking this question as I followed a guided tour of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen permanent exhibition "Cultural Contacts: Living in Europe." Struck by the craftsmanship and visual impact of three very different items: an elaborate and fascinating 1885 mechanical Christmas Mountain (Weihnachtsberg) illustrated in twenty scenes by Max Vogel from the Ore Mountains (bordering Protestant Saxony and Catholic Bohemia), a 1910 Venetian gondola gifted to a Berlin businessman by a merchant from Venice, and a humorous and provocative contemporary wood carving called "Conchita Wurst auf der Mondsichel" (Conchita Wurst on the Crescent), by Berlin-based artist Gerhard Goder. Goder's inspiration for his Madonna-like figure


was the unexpected victory of drag artist Thomas Neuwirth, alias Conchita Wurst, at the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest in Copenhagen. For MEK director Elisabeth Tietmeyer the sculpture not only stands for tolerance and acceptance of other ways of life, it is also emblematic of certain traditional religious tropes — in this case the Madonna on the Crescent — that are woven through the museum's historical collection. The acquisition is therefore a welcome museum intervention, encouraging the viewer, in the guise of tradition, to reflect on new cultural phenomena in European society.

The Conchita Wurst sculpture was installed in front of a small gallery with more traditional religious objects, mostly figures of saints. Among them were also one Advent Calendar illustrated with Muslim events and an unadorned Jewish skullcap. The tragic complexity of religious diversity and persecution in Germany missing from this display was in many ways as startling as Conchita Wurst herself. Nonetheless, the inclusive message of the Conchita Wurst sculpture reflected deeply the sentiments of the many conference speakers who came to Berlin to celebrate the Museum Europäischer Kulturen's birthday. The conference was a true festive gathering of professionals who felt the responsibility and awe of what Wayne Modest has termed the "anxious politics" of Europe and the question of whose heritage is on display. The conference organisers are to be congratulated for gathering such an impressive group of colleagues to take stock of the role of the 21st century European museum of everyday life and to reimagine its potential as a site for creating better futures.

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Contemporary collecting and COVID-19

Alexandra Bounia

The COVID-19 pandemic has initiated many discussions around the world on museums: the sudden closures and their impact for visitors and museums alike; their gradual re-opening and different phases in which this happens in different countries, reflecting priorities and understanding of culture and the arts; the financial impact for institutions and their staff; museums' reactions to the 'digital world', as well as their support for those in need, are among the topics that have attracted the attention of museum professionals, professional organisations (like ICOM, NEMO, and various national bodies), as well as the media (traditional and social alike).

Contemporary collecting has been one of the topics discussed, as museums around the world have been trying to "document history as it unfolds" (Cascone, 2020). The examples are numerous and come from around the world. ICOM's *8 Steps to Support Community Resilience* includes as step number 6 an encouragement to institutions towards "rapid response collecting" and documenting the crisis and its impact. Museums are encouraged to document and exhibit the crisis, the ways people are coping with the trauma, in line with the museum's mission and regardless of its size and type. According to ICOM, such collecting will preserve knowledge and memories for future generations, but it might also help towards recontextualisation of existing collections. Collecting

in collaboration with communities (participative collecting), could also be a way to support these communities to cope with trauma, through sharing emotions and thoughts.

We will try to present here some of these initiatives, although it needs to be stated from the start that the discussion below is far from being all-inclusive; the numbers of institutions involved in such activities is very large and a complete inventory of all initiatives still remains to be done. An initiative undertaken by Made by Us and the International Federation of Public History has created a map that attempts to collect such efforts from around the world (see, <https://ifph.hypotheses.org/3225>). COMCOL has just undertaken an online survey on the same topic, that has been shared in early June this year via its members and ICOM.

Why are museums collecting?

The Auckland Museum in New Zealand justifies its collecting initiative entitled *Collecting COVID-19: 100 lockdown objects* with the following phrases:

"History is created every day. One of our jobs in Auckland Museum is to look at what is happening around us in the present day and to collect and preserve objects, photographs and documents that will help us tell the story of 'now' in the future".

It thus summarizes in the clearest manner what other institutions around the world are also doing: recognizing that history is not just in and about the past, that institutions are not just about things that happened back in time, but that they do relate to the present and need to take a stance towards what is happening now, around them. This is a statement of responsibility towards the future, very much in line with what museums have at their heart: documentation and safeguarding of memories for the generations to come.



<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/your-museum/at-home/collecting-covid-19>



THECITY.NYC

NYC Cultural Institutions Preserve Pandemic Memories in Real Time

Christine Chung: NYC Cultural Institutions Preserve Pandemic Memories in Real Time, <https://www.thecity.nyc/2020/5/6/21257161/nyc-cultural-institutions-preserve-pandemic-memories-in-real-time>



Museum Europäischer Kulturen
27 Mar ·

#CollectingCorona

The corona pandemic is changing the everyday lives of all people in Europe. As a museum for everyday culture we therefore want to collect your...

<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/about-us/whats-new/detail/collectingcorona-a-call-for-submissions-to-the-collection-at-the-museum-of-european-cultures/>

However, it is more than that: As the curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)'s well-known initiative Rapid Response Collecting claimed in 2014, when the gallery firstly opened, "The Rapid Response gallery is about the museum looking outwards and engaging with topics that are in the news. It's an opportunity to think afresh and respond in a more agile way" (Wainwright 2014). In other words, contemporary collecting is not just about documenting the present for the future; it is also about engaging with what is happening around institutions, it is about continuing to be relevant. In addition, contemporary collecting about what is happening around the museum is also an opportunity for institutions to look inwards, look at their collections, think about them differently, rethink what it is that they are used for and

how they can be used to better serve communities. In other words, it is an opportunity to look around but also to look inside.

Very often, people seem to believe that contemporary collecting is something that only museums of history, social history, or ethnography do (or, should do). However, this is not exactly the case. As ICOM's 8 Steps document claims, there are many different aspects to what is happening that museums may choose to focus on, depending on their mission: "e.g. new art around COVID-19, difficulties faced by the homeless, the impact on the environment, new urban landscapes, and the ways cities and communities are affected by the crisis". Many institutions focus on specific topics in their collecting: the Museum of London, for instance, in its initiative *Collecting COVID*, is interested in objects or first-hand experiences that reflect Londoners' lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the Amsterdam Museum calls for submissions of experiences and stories, photos, GIFs, videos, audio files or other expressions from all inhabitants, visitors and fans of the city. The Museum of European Cultures in Berlin, in keeping with its mission, initiated in April a hashtag #CollectingCorona that aims to reach all Europeans; it asks for personal impressions, thoughts and accounts to "document for future generations how Europeans feel about the pandemic". London's Museum of the Home (formerly Geffrye Museum) launched a UK-wide campaign in May to collect photos and personal accounts of people's living experience during the pandemic: they ask people to submit up to five images and respond to seven questions regarding their mental, physical and emotional attitudes towards home after the pandemic and the lockdown.

What are museums collecting?

The contents of these collecting efforts have many similarities. Museums collect stories, experiences and thoughts, usually in the form of oral histories, or texts, photographs, objects, arts and crafts, signs and posters, and other ephemera created during the pandemic. As mentioned previously, in many cases institutions want to record and document the experiences of specific groups of people, mainly their own communities, as for instance in the cases of the Amsterdam Museum, the Museum of the City of New York, the Vesthimmerlands Museum in Denmark, or the Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in the UK. In some cases, the museums provide their audiences

with themes, or areas of collecting. For instance, the Museum of London provides three strands that structure its initiative: “how the physical spaces of the city have been transformed”; “the effects of key and home workers”; “how children and young people are reacting to and coping with the changes now that many schools are closed”. The Museum of European Cultures sets out four questions for its audiences: “What is currently preoccupying us?”; “How has our daily life changed?”; “What worries or concerns us?”; and “What is currently preoccupying people living in Europe?” The Erding Museum in Germany asks the participants to consider three questions: “What does the Coronavirus mean to you personally?; “How did COVID-19 and associated restrictions interfere with your life?; and “How should everyday life continue for you after the crisis – privately and professionally?” In some cases, museums focus on stories and intangible contributions. In some other cases, they are interested in objects. For instance, the V&A is interested in “bringing objects into the museum that through their design articulate the bigger questions of contemporary society” (Gardner in Cascone, 2020). The Cologne City Museum collects stories, but also objects with associations: “We have also been promised two protective face masks worn at the last council meeting in Cologne, by one of the mayors and another council member”. A story presented in a news article about the New York Historical Society (Hester 2020), is quite revealing in this regard:

“In early March, as New York City braced for the spread of the novel coronavirus, hand sanitizer began flying off store shelves. That’s when Margi Hofer, museum director at the New-York Historical Society, got an email about it. Rebecca Klassen, the museum’s associate curator of material culture, sent her a note remarking on the scarcity, and how precious it seemed. She wrote, “Purell has become liquid gold,” Hofer remembered. Nervous shoppers were treating the alcohol-based product as a talisman, and the museum staff decided—to help tell the story of the pandemic—that they ought to add a bottle to the collection. (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/coronavirus-museum-collections>)

Participative collecting and inclusion

Most of the collecting initiatives undertaken have a strong community element to them. It is not only curators who are actively seeking out objects or other materials to include in the institution’s collection; in most cases, it is the institution crowdsourcing these



resources from its community. The call is shared via social media, direct mail, institutional websites and other forms of communication. In most cases there is a process in place, often a form that interested individuals can use to submit their resources. The Joanneum Museum in Austria for instance, offers an online form for the visitors of its website to send their material (*Der Alltag mit dem Coronavirus*); the House of European History shares a form with instructions for its project (*History in the Making: documenting COVID*). In some cases, institutions explain to their contributors that a selection process will take place (as for instance the Auckland Museum); in some other cases, the curators of that selection are mentioned, as for instance in the Amsterdam Museum that mentions that artists, makers and curators together will select and contextualise the submissions.



HYPERALLERGIC.COM

A Museum Is Building an Archive of Your Recipes, Photos, and Face Masks

Elisa Wouk Almino, A Museum Is Building an Archive of Your Recipes, Photos, and Face Masks, hyperallergic.com/562182/collecting-community-history-autry-museum/



BLOG.LTMUSEUM.CO.UK

Contemporary Collecting: An Ethical Toolkit for Museum Practitioners

Ellie Miles, An Ethical Toolkit for Museum Practitioners, <https://blog.ltmuseum.co.uk/2020/03/31/contemporary-collecting-an-ethical-toolkit-for-museum-practitioners/>

The sustainability of these collections is not often discussed. In some cases, it is clear that the museum will follow the processes and criteria that already define its collecting; for instance, the Auckland Museum explains that not all donations will be accepted and refers the participants to this project in their online document on “Donating objects to our museum”. In other cases, the contributors are informed that the future of their submission is going to be discussed later in time: “An active discussion of the content of the submitted object proposals will take place at a later date”, claims the Folklore Museum of the Johanneum.

Effort is made by several institutions to highlight that this is an inclusive process: in other words, that everybody's stories are equally important and should be submitted. The Museum of London, for instance, emphasises that the collections should “reflect the voices and experiences of a broad range of Londoners”; the Amsterdam Museum highlights the “participatory and dynamic manner” of the collecting process; the Museum of European Cultures explains that all contributions will be registered in the Museum's

collection “regardless of language”. London's Museum of the Home places great emphasis on inclusion and highlights that diverse areas of society are encouraged to participate: city dwellers, people from the countryside, key workers, people living alone, parents with little children.

Previous experiences with rapid/urgent collecting

The effort to collect the pandemic has been undertaken by both institutions that are experienced in contemporary collecting and others that are not. The Auckland Museum had previous experience in collecting the women's protest in 2018. The V&A has had experience of ‘rapid collecting’ since 2014. The Joanneum had a project crowdsourcing “green” objects for another exhibition, but also an active project since January 2020 asking people to “Help us fill the showcases”. The Museum of the City of New York and the International Center of Photography in the same city have experience of responsive collecting after disasters such as 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy. The Orange County Regional History Center had previously acquired objects related to the 2016 Pulse shooting (Cascone, 2020).

Engagement and Interpretation

Many institutions have already created exhibitions, mostly online, using the collection they have formulated. They use these exhibitions to invite more contributions to be made; in a way, these online exhibitions are also a medium of collecting.

The Amsterdam Museum presents the digital exhibition *Corona in the City* (<https://www.coronaindestad.nl/en/>) inviting people to continue submissions of their stories. The Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg (Canada) presents its own online exhibition *What acts of kindness have lifted your spirits during the COVID-19 pandemic?* (<https://humanrights.ca/stories/share-your-story#>). The Anacostia Community Museum of the Smithsonian hosts an online collection/exhibition entitled: *Moments of Resilience*, which is also a call for people to “tell their story” about “how communities support each other on a day-to-day basis”.

In some cases, like in the case of the Museum of London, the collection of COVID-19 related material is also connected to the museum's existing collections and offers a form of interpretation for them. For instance, the dress ensemble from 1892 that the museum has

in its collection, worn by Queen Victoria when in mourning for Duke of Clarence, acquires a completely different relevance when it is contextualised as the dress worn by a grandmother to mourn her grandson who had died from influenza during another pandemic at the end of the 19th century.

In some cases, the collections formed during the pandemic are used to exhibit a message which is at the core of the museum's mission. The Czech National Museum, for instance, has recently (25th of May) opened an exhibition on facemasks. The masks, which came to the Museum through donations (crowdsourcing), were created at the early stages of the pandemic when masks were in short supply in the country and people had to create them, as wearing a mask in public was a legal obligation. These homemade masks are now exhibited as symbols of "how the nation got together"; they have become symbols of national ingenuity and resilience, as per the National Museum's mission.

The Centre of Democracy in Adelaide (Australia) offers another example of community engagement combined with collecting: the project *Stitch and Resist* is a participatory craftivism (craft + activism) project that wants to address the question: "How can we continue to resist injustice, engage in the everyday practice of democracy, and take care of our wellbeing in the midst of a pandemic?". It encourages members of the community to use the resources available on the project's website to produce hand-stitched textiles, and share images of them with the institution so that a digital gallery can be created presenting these textiles that have been stitched with the messages and the concerns of the people during the pandemic. Once the institution's operations are back to normal, an

exhibition will be held in Adelaide with a selection of these handicrafts. This project touches both on issues of community engagement and of ethics, which is another important topic in this discussion of contemporary collecting COVID-19 (Sullivan 2020).

Challenges and Ethics of collecting

Collecting during the pandemic presented/s serious challenges: with museums closed, social distancing and working from home, the institutions were not in a position to physically collect artifacts. In some cases, the objects that museums were/are interested in are in short supply or are needed for important reasons (as for instance medical equipment) (see, article by Clarke 2020). As the virus is transmitted through interaction among people but also via objects and surfaces, handling objects is still not considered safe. In many cases, institutions have asked donors to promise the objects or other physical documents, but keep them until the situation has become 'normal' again.

The need for health and safety precautions, but also for ethics to be considered is highlighted by many museum professionals. The Museums Association issued a statement in April 2020 (Heal, 2020) on the ethics of contemporary collecting, which was later reproduced by other professional bodies, such as the American Alliance of Museums. The statement asks for "sensitivity and respect"; furthermore, it calls for museums to put the needs of communities and the public first. Moreover, the institutions are urged to be transparent and clear as to their collecting aims and methods, to respect people's feelings and emotions, to consider issues of safekeeping of digital as well as physical materials and to be supportive in every possible way.

Similarly, ICOM encourages members to follow the Code of Ethics for Museum Professionals and always remember that museums are public institutions accountable to their audiences and stakeholders.

However, there are still many issues to be considered: the question of "whose stories are being told and whose are not?" is still an important one for institutions to contemplate. Enabling people who do not have the means, power, or confidence to contribute to these collections is very important. How these contemporary collections will be interpreted and displayed is also another challenging topic to be considered. As the examples previously mentioned



NPR.ORG

The Smithsonian Is Collecting Coronavirus 'Artifacts' To Document The Pandemic

Mikaela Lefrank, The Smithsonian is Collecting Coronavirus "Artifacts", <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/20/859750008/the-smithsonian-is-collecting-coronavirus-artifacts-to-document-the-pandemic>

show, the same objects/stories can be interpreted from many different perspectives: for example personal, institutional, national. Museums need to provide context for these objects and remember to include other social/economic/political issues that continue to be present during the pandemic (and in some cases are even amplified, such as access to work, food, shelter and so on). Nuances are important, as well as the responsibility to share all aspects of the story and avoid sentimentalism or even nostalgia.

The Joanneum Museum makes a very valuable point when it highlights in their call that “... the pandemic has left Austria with more people unemployed than at any time in the history of the Second Republic. Many entrepreneurs fear for the future of their business. At the moment, the measures put in place are gradually being relaxed, but the coronavirus will still accompany us in our daily lives for even longer – how long, is currently hardly predictable, nor are the longer-term consequences of this crisis on an individual, local and global level.” (<https://www.museum-joanneum.at/volkskunde/sammlungsaufwurf/corona/>)

Museums should stay alert and make sure that they collect and document for the future every aspect of this extraordinary experience we are all living through.

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FLANDERSTODAY.EU

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Different ways to document COVID-19 pandemic

How to collect contemporary history when you don't really know what is going to happen?

Short Example from Espoo City Museum, Finland

Riitta Kela

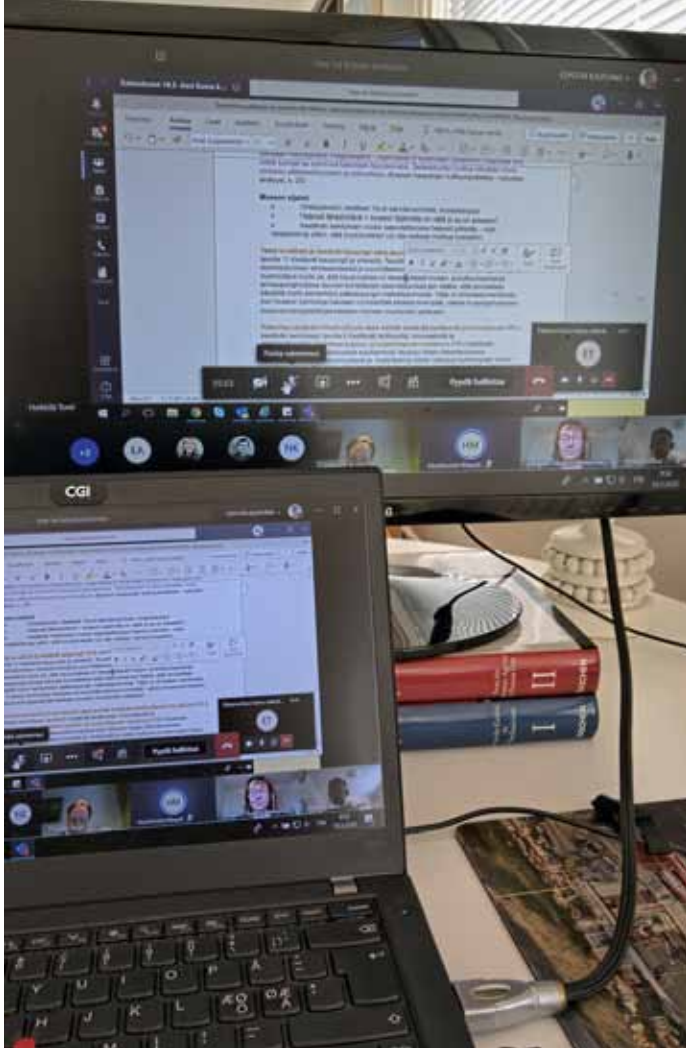
In this very short and practical example from Finland, I will try to exemplify how we have done contemporary collecting during the COVID-19 pandemic in Espoo City Museum. Our museum is the regional municipal museum of the second biggest city of Finland. The city of Espoo is a part of the capital area of Finland with the capital city Helsinki and some other cities. It is also the area which the corona virus and the COVID-19 pandemic has affected most in Finland.

When the situation started to get worse in March, we decided, at first, to collect documentation of how working from a distance will go in our museum and how museum professionals will handle everyday life when schoolchildren, toddlers and work are all managed from our homes. We have done this now for three months and here are some results of this contemporary collecting project.

Home office and lunch break at the same time

Photo Espoo City Museum, Riitta Kela





Video conferencing from the home office

Photo Espoo City Museum, Riitta Kela

The next part of our contemporary collecting project was a web survey of all Espoo City employees. We asked them how their work has changed and how they feel about the situation. We got almost 200 answers in a short time, many employees were eager to help the museum and to share their thoughts about the new situation. The aim of this web survey was to collect and archive the unofficial, casual thoughts and feelings of Espoo City employees. We are now evaluating and analyzing the results of the web survey and taking care of the cataloguing and the longtime preservation of the material.

Related to this, we managed to get in contact with local schools where high school students have written essays about distance schooling and studying from home. They have also done some interesting video projects about the COVID 19 pandemic from the point of view of teenagers. All these will be a part of the collection of Espoo City Museum reminding us of the spring of 2020 and the new situation. We also asked our volunteer photography group, KuvaKamut, to document everything they see and consider important concerning to the pandemic and everyday life.

Espoo City Museum has done all this contemporary collecting work as a part of the national cooperative collection work (TAKO, <http://tako.nba.fi/index>). We have had a couple of video conferences where more than 50 museums from different parts of Finland have shared their thoughts and ideas about what they will



Morning commute to the work during the lockdown

Photo Espoo City Museum, Minna Vento



Teddy bear hunt reached Finland during the first phase of COVID 19 pandemic

Photos Espoo City Museum, Suvi Kettula and Leena Sipponen



do to document the pandemic situation. Altogether we have managed to create an important and impressive museum collection about the COVID-19 pandemic and everyday life in Finland during the spring 2020. Working together, discussions and new, shared solutions have all helped us to document the pandemic in a situation where you don't really know what is going to happen next.

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Call for Papers: An ethnology lab on the working of COVID-19 on Museums

The SIEF Working group Museums & Material Culture (M&MC) in collaboration with the ICOM International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL) and the Reinwardt Academy (Amsterdam University of the Arts), The Netherlands, Amsterdam, wish to announce a conference/seminar/workshop?, The Impact of COVID-19 on Museums and Collections, 8–9 October 2020. This may be held as a digital conference.

The Theme:

The impact of COVID-19 on (y)our daily lives as researchers and professionals working in/on museums and material culture. COVID-19 continues to prompt many museums to keep their doors closed for weeks or even months. They have to cope with sudden loss of income, worries about the wellbeing of their staff and unforeseen challenges related to their buildings, sites, collections and exhibitions. At the same time, the COVID-19 virus has initiated new processes of public engagement. The crisis is sparking a boom in online activities ranging from art-making to virtual museum tours. Many museums have started to post (participatory) calls to locally document this historic event and its effects on society. For this working group meeting, we would like to hear how you have been dealing with this difficult situation: What are the emotional effects of COVID-19 on ourselves and our colleagues? How do we socially and culturally respond to what is happening? How should we (re-)position ourselves? How do the functions and workings of museums as social places change as a result of COVID-19? How do or should we position ourselves in relation to public and private funding in times of coronavirus and in the aftermath? How does COVID-19 change the public perception of museums? Should museums collect and publicly discuss this phenomenon? What are


the ethical questions that accompany it? What are its effects on concepts of diversity and inclusivity within our work? The aim of this two-day expert meeting is to reflect on these challenges and explore what our professional interventions (should) look like.

We encourage members of the M&MC working group and COMCOL to focus on the following topics:

- Emotion management
- Educational programming
- Collection development
- Governance • Information management
- Social Media
- Exhibition making
- Social Events

Submissions

Please submit the title of your paper, an abstract of no more than 100 words and three keywords, together with your name, academic affiliation, and email to

 rwa-heritagelab@ahk.nl, before 20 July 2020.

Summary of the debate on the ICOM-proposal for the new museum definition "Quo vadis Museum?" on 30 January 2020 at the Jewish Museum Berlin

with Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Markus Walz and students of the University of Applied Sciences (HTW) Berlin

Alina Gromova

On 30 January 2020, the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) and the University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW) organized a discussion duel entitled "Quo vadis Museum?" This event took up one of the most important current debates on the future of museums worldwide – the discussion on the proposal for a new museum definition by the International Council of Museums, ICOM. The duel between Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, ICOM Executive Board and Director of the State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony, and Markus Walz, ICOM Germany and Professor of Theoretical and Historical Museology at the Leipzig University of Applied Sciences, was moderated by five students of Museum Management and Communication at the HTW Berlin.

The debate at the Jewish Museum Berlin, initially planned as a discussion before a manageable circle of experts, met with overwhelming interest from over 400 spectators. On this evening, a new format was created in the colorfully illuminated glass courtyard of the Jewish Museum: a duel between the two opponents, who expressed their opinions in pointed terms, was moderated by five students. The moderators Johannes

Berger, Leonie Erbe, Kristina Iskova, Rebecca Stoll and Luna Weis provided background information on the debate about the new definition of the museum, asked provocative questions and, using a watch, ensured that both panelists had the same amount of speaking time. A discussion format à la Presidential Debate was launched!

How did the processes of finding the new museum definition work?

At the beginning of the debate, the moderators pointed to a controversy: on the one hand, according to Suay Aksoy, the president of ICOM International, the search for the new museum definition was the most democratic process that had ever taken place at ICOM. (<https://icom.museum/en/news/the-extraordinary-general-conference- postpones-the-vote-on-a-new-museum-definition/>) Thus, 37 round tables were held worldwide in 2015/2016. Participants from 39 countries discussed the challenges that museums internationally will have to face in the future. Based on the results of these discussions, the Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials Committee of ICOM, MDPP, made a clear recommendation: we need a new definition of a museum that will meet the challenges of the 21st century. As a next step, all ICOM members were invited to share their suggestions for museum definitions on the ICOM website (you can read the more than 250 suggestions here: <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-museum-definition-the-backbone-of-icom/>). However, according to the moderators, some dissenting voices publicly point out that the Kyoto resolution proposal to revise the ICOM museum definition would not represent the definition proposals quoted on the ICOM website (<http://network.icom.museum/europe>). In their opinion, the process of finding a definition had thus not been democratic.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch countered this criticism with her own perspective: the mere fact that such a large organisation as the World Museums Association, with 40,000 members, 20,000 museums and 157 national and international committees, has started such a process of definition is already in itself very democratic. This three-year process has also been very transparent, because from year to year ICOM committees have discussed the results of the round tables at the annual meetings in Paris and have given the "green light" for the further course of the process by a majority of votes.



Discussion of the new museum definition, from left to right: Johannes Berger, Luna Weis, Markus Walz, Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Kristina Iskova, Leonie Erbe and Rebecca Stoll in the Glass Courtyard of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

While Léontine Meijer-van Mensch stressed the democratic course of the process, Markus Walz questioned the democratic structure of ICOM in principle. Although democracy is a fundamental good, he said, ICOM's statutes confirm that it functions differently from a state. The structure of ICOM does not provide for each member to have the same rights of co-determination. Rather, the structure of ICOM tries to reflect the range of the world in the corresponding decision-making bodies and not the number of its members, Walz said.

Do museums need a definition or rather a vision?

The moderators opened the next part of the discussion with the words of Jette Sandahl, Chair of the ICOM Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials Committee MDPP: "In December 2018 the ICOM Executive Board has decided that it is time to develop an alternative definition which will be more relevant and appropriate for museums in the 21st century and future museum landscapes. It should be a definition which recognizes the dissimilar conditions and practices of museums in diverse and rapidly changing societies, and supports museums in developing and adopting new scientific paradigms and addressing more adequately the complexities of the 21st century". According to Sandahl, the new proposal for the museum definition is also understood as an ideal: because museums are so diverse, they do not have to meet all the criteria of this definition in order to be recognized

by ICOM as museums, Sandahl remarks in the issue of "Museum International" on the definition of a museum. (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638019>) If ICOM does not have a definition in the future, but only a vision – how will this affect the museums in concrete terms? – was the question of the moderators.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch expressed her doubt that ICOM is on the way to formulating a universal definition in 2020: "I think we are over it. Do we still need a universal definition that makes sense for every situation, especially globally? I don't think that's ICOM's job to provide a universal definition that can be used in legislation in all countries of the world." Meijer-van Mensch stressed that today, different definitions may be needed for different purposes. For example, the current Kyoto decision proposal could certainly not be used as a criterion for decisions on ICOM membership. However, this proposal does not contradict the ICOM Code of Ethics, which all ICOM members must eventually accept. She summarized: if museums want to be supported by ICOM, the authoritative voice of the international museum world, a vision can serve this purpose.

Asked whether one should abandon a definition and instead use a vision as a basis for the work of museums, Markus Walz drew on the ICOM Statutes: Article 3 of the ICOM Statutes determines who can be a member of ICOM – for this purpose the definition is necessary.

Article 2 of the ICOM statutes is the mission of ICOM, which was revised a few years ago, Walz said. From his point of view it makes no sense to write the same thing in two different places. Basically, this is about membership. And because you have to justify who can and who cannot become a member of ICOM, certain criteria have to apply. He also said that it is not possible in Germany to receive public funding without being asked whether the self-presentation is sufficient to fulfill the ICOM museum definition. There are several countries – predominantly in Europe – where the museum definition has been incorporated into state legislation, Walz said. Therefore, the legal question of whether one is allowed to open a museum at all is also bound to the ICOM museum definition.

Is museum a place where political discussions should be led?

The next question posed by the moderators was connected to the political role of cultural institutions in general and museums in particular. Example: The Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin is actively engaged against right-wing populism. The right-wing populist AfD party therefore tried to deny the theatre its right to exist in 2018. Time and again, according to the moderators, public institutions are accused of political commitment on the grounds of undermining the unwritten rule of neutrality. The Kyoto resolution proposal for the new definition of the museum provides a clear answer to such situations – museums are defined there as "spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures". Museums are therefore not seen as neutral places. Is a museum a place where political discussions should be led?

Reacting to this question, Markus Walz once again addressed the central role of a museum definition. In his opinion, "the museum" only exists to the extent that there is a definition text that can draw boundaries: one lies within the boundaries of what a museum is, and the other lies outside. Also, the majority of German museums are made by people in their spare time for pleasure. And finally, according to Walz, a private individual should decide for himself whether he wants to be political in his work or not. Publicly funded museums, on the other hand, have a public task to fulfill, and these tasks come about by democratic decision. In this case, Walz's question is: What is the mission and how is it fulfilled?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch recalled the results of the round tables, which were held in a global context.

The participants in these round tables had expressed a strong desire to understand museums as a tool for agency in order to take up certain topics that move us, e.g. decolonization and, of course, the question of repatriation. And it is important, precisely in this context, that museums take a stand, position themselves and also become more activist, even if this is something that is somewhat difficult to do in Germany.

What is the future of the new definition of the museum?

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch reported that a new MDPP 2 group will soon begin its work and lead it for the next three years. The new proposal will then be put to the vote. (https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MDPP2_2020_Museum_Definition-Brief_EN.pdf) The MDPP 2 group was supplemented by, among others, some chairmen of the national committees who criticised the process so far: for example, a representative of ICOM France. Meijer-van Mensch stressed that ICOM is a learning institution that would learn from its mistakes. At the end she expressed the hope that in the second round the criticism would be dealt with in a less personal and less emotional way.

Markus Walz reported on the interim status of the work of ICOM Germany, which has already done quite a bit on the subject of museum definition: in the first ever member survey, members were invited by ICOM Germany to give or not to give their appreciation of the smaller textual elements of the definition and the Kyoto proposal. 302 people participated in this member survey. (<https://icom-deutschland.de/de/nachrichten/100-ergebnisse-der-mitgliederumfrage-zur-museumsdefinition-liegen-vor.html>) Members were also invited by ICOM Germany in 20 March 2020 to continue the dialogue on the topic of museum definition in a members' forum. Due to security measures in connection with the spread of the coronavirus, the members' forum had to be postponed. The new date will be announced as soon as possible.

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COMCOL Member's Survey 2020: the new museum definition

Alexandra Bounia and Danielle Kuijten

One part of the survey COMCOL shared with its members at the end of January 2020 focused on the museum definition. In the aftermath of the long discussions and debates that took place during the triennial conference of ICOM in Kyoto in September 2019, and before the continuation of discussions in Paris in June 2020, COMCOL wanted to contact its members and get their feedback, so that they are better represented by the committee. This part of the survey consisted of only three questions: one multi-choice, and two open-ended.

This brief article aims to summarise the outcomes of this part of the survey.

Thoughts and ideas

The first open-ended question provided the participants with the new definition proposed by ICOM in 2019, and asked for the thoughts and ideas that came to mind when reading it. The responses varied in terms of their length and engagement as well as in their perspectives. Out of the 25 respondents, 23 commented in this field.

There were brief positive answers, like: 'Sounds good'; 'useful'; 'I agree very much with this definition'. Some answers were positive in an indirect way, or in comparison with the previous definition:

'More contemporary than the former one'; or, 'This is a much more inspiring definition than the existing one'.

'This is exactly what museums do and strive for the ideal'; 'It is good for museums to play an active and socially engaged role'.

Other respondents pointed out that there is a clear vision perspective in this definition: 'This is a vision not a mission'; 'It is a vision'; 'It is not a definition in a strict, classical sense but an inspirational vision';

'I very much support ideas included in the new definition proposal, still I have to acknowledge that it sounds more like vision, not definition'.

The responses that focused on the visionary character of the new definition saw it both as a positive and a negative point. 'This is a manifesto not a definition. It's trying to be all things to all people. It's a mash-up of contemporary political and social agendas.' In some case the negative responses are very clearly put: 'Far far far too verbose!'; or: 'This is extremely badly written and does not say what a museum is. It suggests that museums are all about social inclusion and misses our fundamental role in caring for and giving access to objects. It is not the job of museums to address human dignity and social justice – these are a given and should not be listed here'.

The role of the museums entered into other answers as well: 'Museum is a power engine for collecting', argues one member; while another claims: 'Museums are in place to aid the security of the cultur[al] heritage and history of societies'.

Some respondents took a very measured approach: 'For me this seems relevant, but museums are so diverse, it might not fit everyone.' Or, 'we have to discuss it!'

Despite the fact that some respondents found it inspirational ('The initial phrase "Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces" makes me feel motivated to be part of this!'), other respondents took a more reluctant approach:

'The proposal of a new definition is in my opinion complicated for several reasons: 1) it is way too long to function in the everyday museums work; 2) it is very political (the strong emphasis on democracy, polyphony and transparency) which can cause difficulties in several countries; 3) it is so wide and detailed that it can be counterproductive. There are museums that do not or cannot live up to the requirements presented in the definition but should therefore not be excluded from the museum community'.

There seemed to be from some members engagement and an effort to balance different views: 'I understand the need for a new definition. I agree with most of the terms used in the definition above. But I think this long text is more a mission statement than a definition.'

As museum workers we need a definition which is both practical and ambitious and which allows us to explain to everyone what a museum is about, and to defend museums in all kinds of potentially difficult political circumstances. As such, I feel that the new museum definition should mention both functions and goals and be more brief. I have expressed similar thoughts in [a] LinkedIn post:...

A respondent shortened the definition and offered an alternative to it: 'I tried to shorten the proposed museum def[inition] in this way: "Museums are not for profit. They work in active partnership with and for diverse people and communities to identify, collect, research, interpret and exhibit heritage and to safeguard it for future generations. Museums are polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the past, the present and the future. They enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing."'

Another member argued – in a positive yet critical way: 'I understand the last part better. I feel happy to see how this text sounds more progressive and open than the last museum definition. The first one is a little bit long and I can't sense exactly what is being said. I believe the word education should be included in one of the parts, maybe the last one.'

A similar approach was taken by another respondent who claimed: 'I do share the aims. For me, museums should be places for everyone and based on sense, science and society. Museums do re-constructions. this should be done in an honest way.'

This text seems to be to me more a political demand or goal than a definition. ICOM has to be based on international law. I don't know if this sentence reflects this. Also, if museums are not democratic, not inclusive, not polyphonic, not participatory etc. they are still museums.

Moreover, every era and every society develop[s] its own time-dependent understanding of what and how exactly [it] is inclusive, democratic, etc. This non simultaneity – sometimes at the same time or society, should be considered.'

The final phrase of this response summarizes and puts in words something that seems implicit in many other responses as well: 'I wish [for] a broad agreement'.

Doing a very simple sentiment analysis, it seems that there are 4 negative answers, 9 positive ones and 10 that take a very neutral approach, either by acknowledging positive and negative perspectives in the new definition, or by not commenting on it and preferring instead to focus on giving opinions about museums in general.

What should the role of COMCOL be?

There were 23 answers regarding the role of COMCOL in the museum definition discussion.

Two members responded that they were not sure what the role of the committee should be. Two more members asked COMCOL to be an 'active contributor', most probably meaning that they ask the committee to support the definition. Four respondents clearly articulated their expectations for a positive stance from the committee ('Support the definition', 'To support the new definition'; 'Given the social engagement suggested in various papers from COMCOL, I think it would be quite natural to fully support this definition.'). One of the responses connected the positive stance with their expectations from the committee in general: 'Future-oriented thinking and action in line with the new definition.' The role of the committee was also described as: 'advanced, to present new trends in museology'

A number of answers connected the stance of COMCOL with collections: 'Empathise [with] the importance/value and role of collections in museums. Without them, museum spaces are simply event and/or education venues'; 'to focus on the collection and collecting as a cultural practice';

'to ensure the execution of the museums mandate in management of collections'; 'collections are a central part in a museum and they should reflect how inclusive and diverse [they] are. COMCOL could address [the need for] more analysis on case studies'; 'To focus on basic collections care and the fundamental role of museums.'

Obviously, members expect COMCOL to take part in the discussions: 'To actively partake in the discussion, especially [about] what a diverse collection is.'

And, they suggest how this can be done: 'first, ask the members for their opinion[s], analyze the results, [provide] feedback to the COMCOL members,

discuss it with the members of the MDDP' 'COMCOL can gather the opinions of its members (as you are doing now) and pass them on to ICOM during the preparation process.' 'To channel members' opinions in some way (although easier said than done!)

The same expectation of 'channeling' members' ideas is expressed by others as well: 'To be a society and the platform of supporting this idea (develop and publish good practices) and support and meet members [and] each other to build the net[work] of aware members.'

Collaboration and active participation in the process is also advocated: 'I think COMCOL should help ICOM to keep the participatory and diverse approach that is within this proposal. So, COMCOL should have an active role in the discussions.'

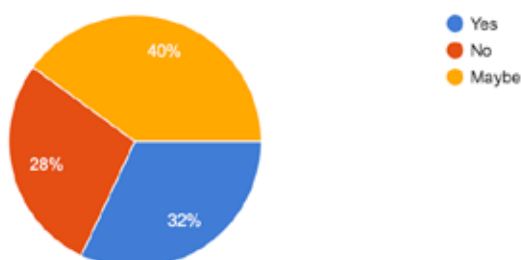
The difficulty of such role is also acknowledged: 'Difficult question. There is already a Standing Committee and ICOFOM. We should stand up and give arguments in relation to collecting, if this topic would be 'forgotten'... but that's not the case. Actually, I think it is very useful that COMCOL gathers ideas (as you do in this survey), possibly create an internal discussion, and share the results with the Standing Committee and ICOFOM.'

There seems to be an emphasis on what one member described as: 'Contribution from the perspective of the committee's mission.' The views of the members seem to be summarized in the four words listed by a contributor: 'listening; sophisticated; reach a consensus; workshop'.

Further discussions

The last question in this section asked participants about their availability for further discussions on the definition:

Would you be available to participate to any activities/discussions about the new definition?
25 responses



A majority seems to be positive – even though reluctantly as 40% of the responses were undecided.

Conclusions

It seems that the discussion around the new definition still has a way to go. Moreover, as this survey was undertaken just before the pandemic, we need to bear in mind that ideas, views and emotions on the definition and the role of museums might have changed in the meantime.

In any case, COMCOL needs to be listening to its members, to facilitate sophisticated dialogue, to contribute towards reaching a consensus and to make every effort to include all members in this discussion.

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COMCOL members's survey 2020: a brief report on expectations and relations

Alexandra Bounia and Danielle Kuijten

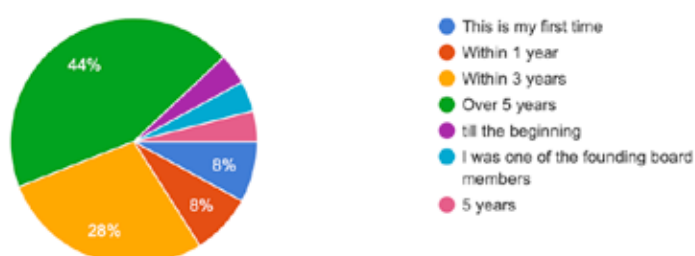
In January 2020, the board of COMCOL undertook the initiative to share with the members of the Committee a brief survey, in order to understand better what the expectations of the members are and how COMCOL can better serve them. The survey was in the form of a short questionnaire (11 questions) created in Google Forms; it was sent out via e-mail to all the more than 350 individual and institutional members of the Committee. The survey consisted of two parts (plus demographic questions): the first part was a series of questions regarding members' expectations and experiences of interacting with the committee. The second part consisted of open-ended questions and focused on the definition of museums, and the expectations of the members regarding COMCOL's participation in this process.

Despite the fact that the response rate was rather low – only 25 responses were received – the data collected were both interesting and valuable. In the following paragraphs, we are going to share the results of the first part of the survey, i.e. the one that relates to members' expectations of COMCOL, and discuss them in brief. The outcomes regarding the museum definition are discussed in a separate brief report.

Who were our respondents?

The respondents to this survey were mostly people who have been members of COMCOL for over five years; some among them were founding members of the Committee.

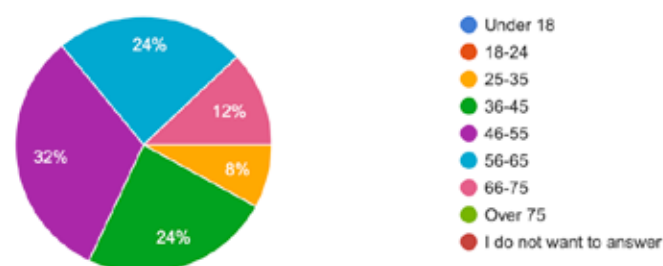
1. How long have you been a member of COMCOL? 25 responses



14 out of 25 (56%) of the respondents have been members of the Committee for 5 years and above. Only 4 people (16%) became members of COMCOL during the last year; the remaining percentage (28%) relates to colleagues who joined the Committee within the last three years. We therefore realized that those who have been on the committee for longer periods of time or since the beginning are still very committed and willing to participate in initiatives undertaken by COMCOL.

The members who responded belong to a wide age range and come from all different parts of the world. Countries ranged from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Finland to Australia, Barbados, Taiwan, Brazil and South Africa. The representation from countries of Europe, however, was much larger than that from other parts of the world.

Approximately how old are you? 25 responses



In terms of professional roles and positions, the respondents fall within the following categories:

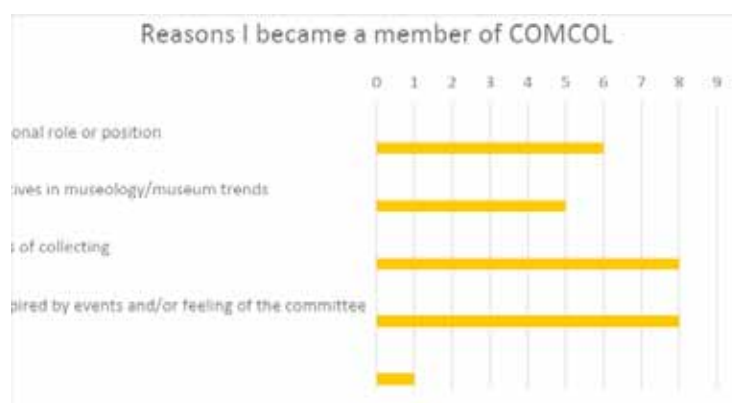
Professional roles



The largest numbers belong to people working in collections management, holding the position of curator or of museum director.

Their professional role and a general interest in collections and collections management seem to be the most important reasons that made people become members of COMCOL. However, other reasons were also mentioned: networking, the 'feeling of the committee', and inspiring events seem to be very important as well.

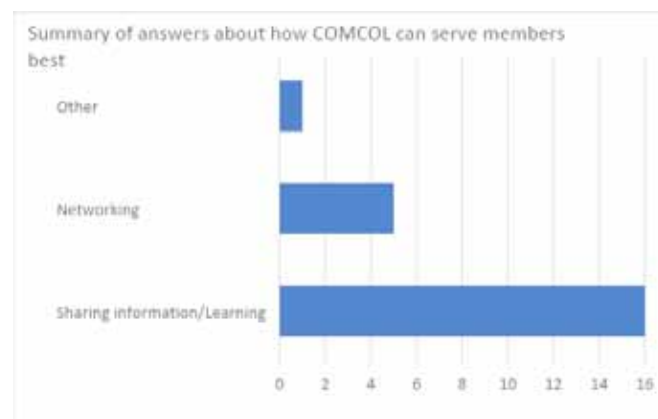
Why am I a member?



"Exciting, welcoming, engaging and looking forward" are words used by one of the respondents to describe the committee. People also mention the need to "get support", while others see a need for, in their words: "Discussions towards how to develop a museum collection in a[n] inclusive, democratic and open way".

How can the committee serve you best?

The open-ended question regarding how COMCOL can serve its members best brought up a series of interesting points. Most of the respondents seem to value learning, sharing best practices and creating a network for exchanging views and ideas.



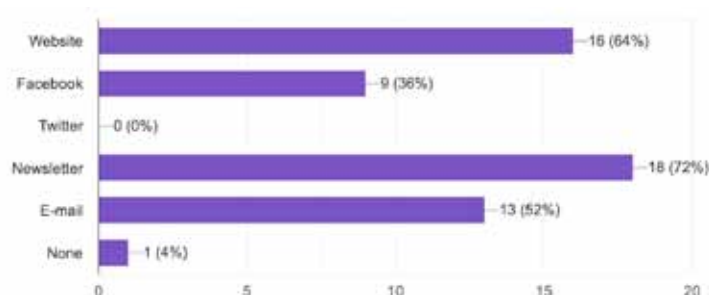
Some of the respondents provided more specific ideas and requests: "Why don't you initiate a project concerning a certain topic, e.g. collecting intangible heritage?"; "Open a digital group for discussion"; "To become more inclusive; organizing regional groups; developing new initiatives (different manuals, for example)".

The words "inclusive" and "inclusiveness" appear in many of the answers. This referred to regions of the world that need to be included in the discussion or empowered/supported, the audience of museums that need to be involved in decision-making about their cultural heritage, as well as resources that need to be made available more widely: "By promoting collaboration among collections and those working with them worldwide"; "By combining live encounters (for the happy few) with online hands-on information and documentation (for everyone)".

When it comes to the platforms members use to stay in contact with the committee, members responded that the newsletter and the website remain the most important ones, followed closely by email.

4. Which communication platform do you use to stay updated with news from COMCOL (multiple answers possible)

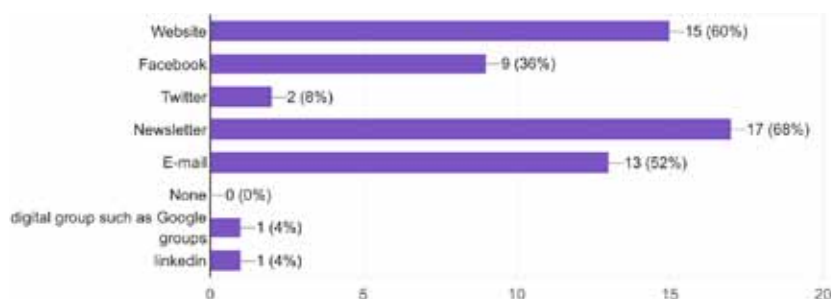
25 responses



If these are the current platforms, the following question provided some insight regarding the platforms that members wish the Committee to develop further:

5. Which communication platform would you prefer to stay up to date? (multiple answers possible)

25 responses

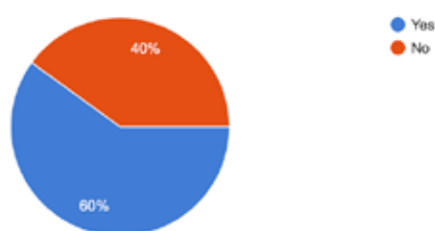


The newsletter, the website, emails and Facebook seem to retain primary importance for the members. However, some members also seem to ask for other social media platforms as well, as Twitter, LinkedIn, and digital discussion groups, such as Google groups. The newsletter and the website have attracted the largest number of responses to these questions and they seem to be very important for our members. COMCOL thus has to work more on these two media, as well as to develop new ones.

Most of the respondents have participated in a committee event.

6. Did you ever participate in a COMCOL event (such as conference a working group, etc)?

25 responses

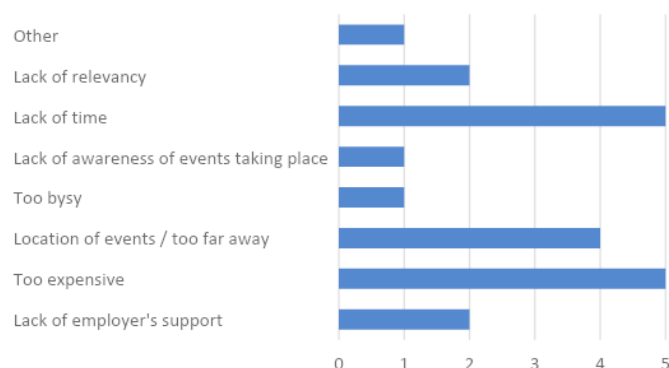


The positive responses mentioned the following events:



Equally or even more important were the answers from members who have not attended the Committee's

Reasons members have not attended events / any or not as many as they wanted to



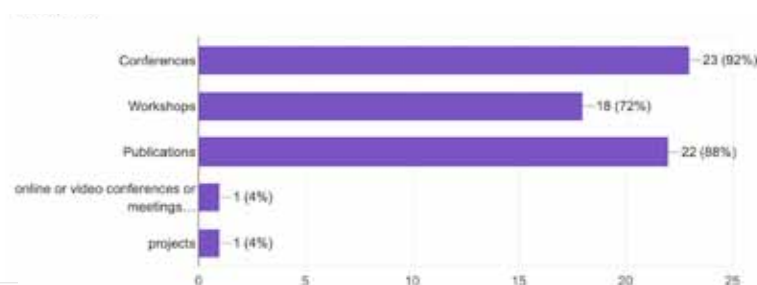
events in the past. Lack of time, financial reasons, lack of support by employers, and relevancy to members' interests seem to be the most important reasons that prevented members from attending any event, or not as many events as they would have liked to.

Activities that members would be interested in

The questions in the previous section can be combined with the responses to questions regarding what activities members would like COMCOL to be engaged in. The organization of conferences and workshops are the most popular answers. It is also important to notice the number of responses regarding publications.

7. What activities of COMCOL have you an interest in? (multiple answers possible)

25 responses

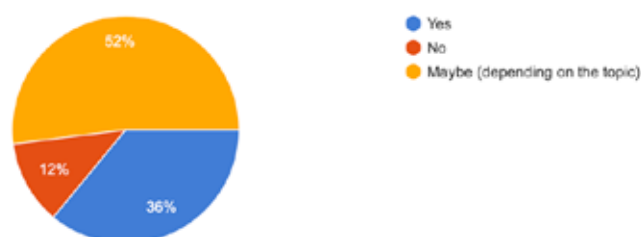


COMCOL has been thinking about organizing a series of webinars (well before this became popular during the social distancing measures due to the pandemic). Two of the questions, therefore, focused on taking respondents' views on this topic.

Respondents were reluctantly positive to the idea:

Would you be interested in participating in webinars?

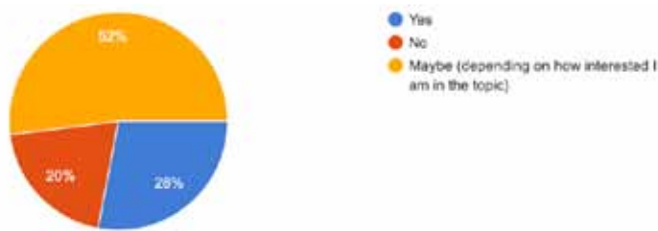
25 responses



They were equally reluctant to commit towards a fee for these events:

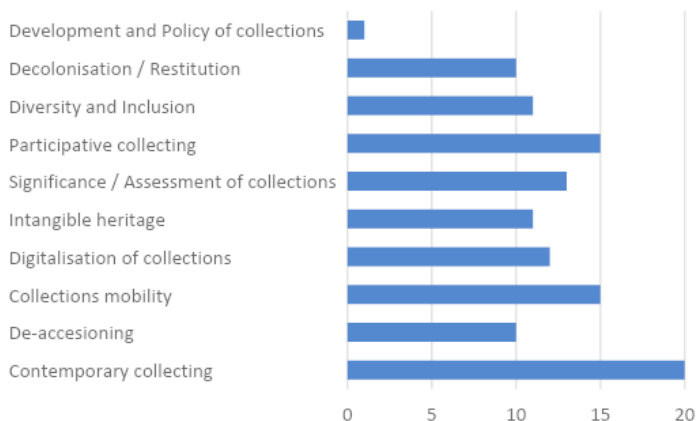
If the answer to the above is yes, would you be willing to pay a small fee for that?

25 responses



Not surprisingly, both the wish to attend an event and pay for it depend on the topic and how much people are interested in it. The multiple choice question regarding the topics that would attract members to these events (online or not) resulted in the following list:

Topics of interest for events/publications/seminars

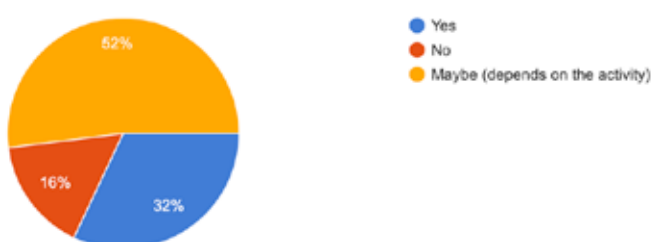


Being actively involved in COMCOL

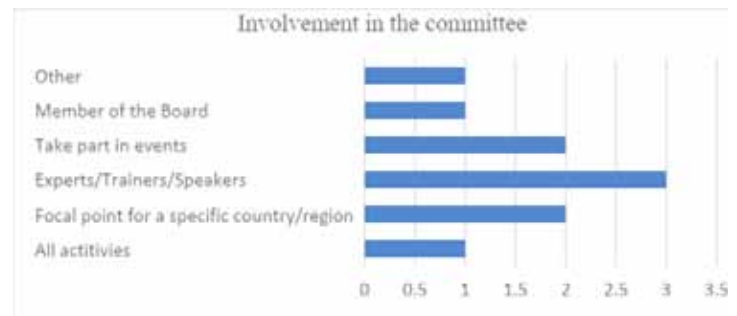
Participants in this research were positive about being more actively involved in the committee, however they wanted to be more informed about what this entails.

Would you be more actively involved in the activities of COMCOL?

25 responses



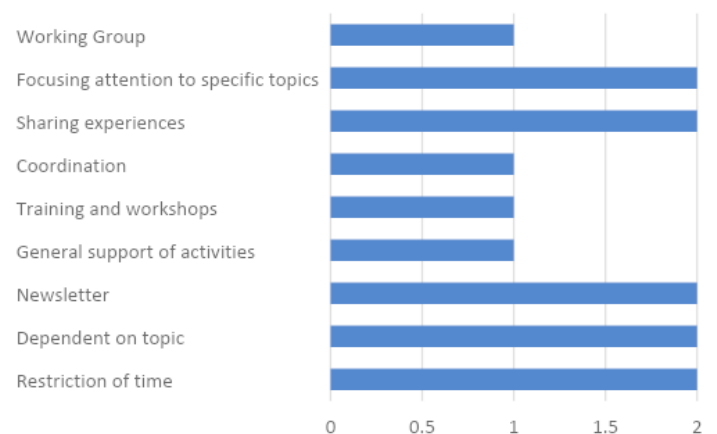
11 members responded that they would be willing to participate in various activities.



Most respondents would like to participate as experts, trainers or speakers in events, whereas a few members would like to become focal points for COMCOL's reach in a country or a region.

This willingness became more specific in the following question where respondents were asked to offer examples of the areas of their interest in contributing.

Specific tasks that members are willing to offer support in



The final question in this section was an open-ended one, regarding ideas or views that the respondents wanted to share with the committee. Apart from the general wishes for the future, and encouragement to be more active and inspirational, some respondents came up with more practical ideas about the format of conferences: "I would prefer huge conferences every 2 years and smaller workshops with specific topics every year (so the travel expenses are not so high)"; Practical suggestions about networking: "Perhaps an online member list including specific interests of each members over a certain period of time (e.g.: from 2020 to 2024 my main interests lie in...)"; and suggestions for focusing on specific areas: "More focus on best practice for collections management and less on social issues"; "More programmes about art collections".

Conclusions

The survey of the members' opinions, despite its response rate, which was not as high as expected, provided the Board with an opportunity to listen to the voice of the members and make decisions about next steps and activities. It seems that there is work to be done in order to retain the interest of committed members, but also to encourage larger commitment from new members. Emphasis needs to be placed on the newsletter and other publications, while continuing to invest in the website and social media. Careful thought should be given to the venues for forthcoming events, to make sure that participation is possible for different groups of colleagues as the committee goes to them, instead of expecting them to come to it. There is a list of areas and topics that the Committee can now focus on, like contemporary collecting, collections mobility, participative collecting, decolonization of collections, art collections and intangible heritage collections. Finally, new ideas and ways of thinking about networking and sharing of good practices need to be developed. COMCOL can be a platform for sharing, supporting and inspiring each other. And, it will continue striving to be so.

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COMCOL – Committee for Collecting – is the International Committee of ICOM dedicated to deepening discussions and sharing knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collection development. COMCOL Newsletter provides a forum for developing the work of COMCOL and we welcome contributions from museum professionals, scholars and students all over the world: short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to cooperate, introductions to new research or other matters. Views and opinions published in the newsletter are the views of the contributors. Contributions for the next issue are welcomed by 15 October 2020. Please contact the editors if you wish to discuss a theme or topic for publication.

COMCOL Newsletter team is looking for the new team members. If you are ready to help us with the Newsletter, please contact Riitta Kela, riitta2.kela@espoo.fi

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