

Ethics Committee Report
to
ICOM Advisory Committee & ICOM Executive Council
(June 2008 meetings, Paris)

1. Practical and administrative matters

1.1 Ethics Committee meeting, Paris, 30 November 2007 – changed to a Workshop

The Ethics Committee was not able to realise fully its planned formal meeting on 30 November 2007 in Paris, since some apologies in the last week resulted in a very small attendance of three persons (Chairperson plus two members).

The small number present instead devoted most of the day to an informal Workshop meeting. The Chairperson had prepared an alternative, Workshop-style agenda in the previous week, and members used the time (with Acting Secretary General Piet Pouw and ICOM President Alissandra Cummins present for part of the session) to explore some broader issues that have been pressing in on the Committee's work for some time. These were:

- a consideration of the rising interest world-wide in ethical matters and their impact within the profession (proved by the international media's intense and insistent coverage of ethical issues concerning museum collections for the last two years);
- planning an education programme to be undertaken on the application of the ICOM Code in various countries over several years (see further below);
- a consideration of how the work of the Ethics Committee could more actively implement its commitment to consciousness-raising in ethical orientation in daily work throughout the museum profession, and
- raising public awareness of ICOM's work as an international body – through its central emphasis on the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* (2004), and self-regulation by the museum profession – as part of the ICOM Strategic Plan objectives, 2007-2010.

1.2 Regularity and recurrence of meetings

In previous triennia the Ethics Committee (under the Chairmanship of Geoffrey Lewis) normally met once per year. Since 2004, the greatly increased activity of cases and topics involving ethical matters, ICOM and the museum profession generally have tended to place intensified pressure on the Ethics Committee to increase its activity to two meetings per year.

However two factors have worked against this potentiality. First: there are economic issues. The Ethics Committee pursues its work through the honorary service of members (without travel or accommodation assistance provided by ICOM, and without any Secretariat staff formally dedicated to co-ordinate or provide initiative support to the work of the Committee). This is the usual case for service on most of ICOM's committees.

However increasing the Ethics Committee meetings from one to two-per-year proves to be a burden on members who must make their own provision and arrangements for travel (usually to

Paris). In some countries, national governments regularly provide assistance for members of the museum profession to participate in significant gatherings internationally. In other countries, there is no such tradition. This makes the burden of travel and attendance increase unreasonably for some members.

Apart from financial (resource) considerations, the doubling of meetings per year has also produced a substantial increase in the secretarial and logistical burden for the Committee itself – and indeed in costs of holding such meetings (booking of rooms, translation of materials, and simultaneous translation necessary for formal meetings to occur). Other Committees that work predominantly in one language have the possibility to meet at weekends; by contrast, the Ethics Committee has to meet during the preceding week before Advisory or Executive Council meetings, to secure simultaneous translation. There is also a greater effort on the part of the Ethics Committee to translate material of relevance to members, and to facilitate communication informally among members in English and French.

For ICOM to move affirmatively to a two-meetings-per-year cycle for the Ethics Committee, it would require some dedicated staff and more resources allocated to support the Committee than has been possible previously.

However for the present, the Ethics Committee Chairperson proposes to return to one formal meeting per year (mid-year, coinciding with the Advisory Committee cycle), but to increase this meeting to a duration of two days rather than one. This has been adopted for 2008, when the Ethics Committee will meet for two days (29 and 30 May) in the week before the Advisory Committee and Executive Council meetings at the beginning of June. Since the Executive Council will hold its December meeting in 2008 in Shanghai, the Ethics Committee will send a report to the meeting in Shanghai – but is not planning to hold a formal meeting of the Committee in China at that time.

2. Cases considered by the Ethics Committee

ICOM continues to consider some fourteen cases (currently) involving substantial ethical issues or potential breaches of the ICOM Code of Ethics that have been referred to the Committee.

The details of these cases remain confidential until their resolution permits some general – or more specific- statement from the Ethics Committee about the principles or issues involved, and the decisions reached by the Committee – after their conclusion.

3. Increased public presentations by Ethics Committee members and other ICOM colleagues on ethical issues

The Committee meanwhile (mostly through the Chairperson) responds to a great number of queries or consultations throughout the year about ethical issues. These are recurrent, diverse and ongoing.

At times textual material is produced to assist such queries. Articles (texts) may be undertaken on certain topics for publication (a contribution to an international debate on the Parthenon marbles and their contested location – a text by the Chairperson in *Museum Management and Curatorship* published in March 2008). Ethics Committee and other ICOM members are regularly supported by the Chairperson in support of their participation in international symposia (in Milan in 2007; in Paris – at the Musée du Quai Branly – in February; in the Athens Conference in the new Acropolis Museum (President of ICOM Europe) in May; in the United States (at an Ethics Workshop – Eva Maehre Lauritzen; and in support of W Richard West and

Regine Schulz representing ICOM at a US-ICOM and other AAM meetings in Denver, Colorado, at the end of April 2008

4. A key project for the Ethics Committee:

‘Museum Ethics in Action’: Ethics training and awareness workshops (an ethics education programme through ICOM, 2008-2012)

This subject – and a resulting fully developed ‘Project’ – was the major outcome of the Ethics Committee Workshop (30 November 2007). It will be the theme of a special session in the Advisory Committee meetings in Paris (June 2008).

The following is an outline of how the Ethics Committee now advocates and proposes to pursue this ‘ICOM Project’ in forthcoming years. It is a project that revolves around a Workshop model of training in ethical awareness.

1. Introduction

- n The Interactive method, developed by Ms Eva Mæhre Lauritzen, former President of ICOM Norway, is using a case-study approach to teaching, through museum ethics “stories” (or applied narratives illuminating ethical issues as they often arise in the lives of members of the museum profession).
- n The case-study method is particularly suited to multi-viewpoint learning and contextually gained experience – at various levels of readiness, previous training, or experience in a profession.
- n For the reasons indicated, the case-study method is favoured in graduate courses for business schools, law and other kinds of applied professional training – rather than a reliance on textual reading, linear argument, or academic styles of lecturing.
- n The Case-study approach is also particularly suited to drawing on ‘life experience and life-learning’ by individuals and groups; it does not create automatic divisions between academically and vocationally trained personnel.
- n The method is developed to engage staff at ALL levels, and workshops are preferably run with mixed professionals from the same museum, or several persons from each museum. The workshops should not be presented for academically trained staff solely, or in isolation from other kinds of staff or volunteers. Cultural diversity is also an issue to be considered in terms of ensuring that such workshops are ‘inclusive’, not serving the interests of one group or mainstream community of interests to the exclusion of others.

2. Objectives

- n Increase awareness of, and promote use of and respect for, the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* among museums and museum personnel.

- ∩ Increase the level of training of museum personnel in ethical issues and advance professional standards through the desire to understand and uphold ethical standards.
- ∩ Increase understanding of diverse ethical codes developed in different national situations and contexts – while heightening awareness of what connects them in common, underlying *principles* of ethical conduct for the museum profession.
- ∩ Promote awareness of ethical training as ongoing: based on continuous professional learning and a proactive wish to find the best ethical outcomes and solutions to complex issues facing the museum profession today.

3. Approaches to be used and promoted (through ICOM to the museums sector internationally)

- ∩ Encourage openness and discussion about ethical issues whenever they arise.
- ∩ Make ethical issues a part of the daily work of a museum.
- ∩ Be assured that museum personnel are familiar with the content of the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* – and aware of other codes as most relevant in any local or national context.
- ∩ Arrange a workshop for the complete staff (if small) or a section of a museum staff (if large) – 1/2 day.
- ∩ Promote further conduct of such workshops regularly – since different ethical issues will arise over time, and they need to be revisited often in discussion/training situations.
- ∩ Make ethical issues part of regular programmed gatherings/conferences/symposia/workshops within the profession or within a single country or region.

In addition to this report to the Advisory Committee, a short table and report of the service of Ethics Committee members to ICOM in the preceding triennium will be presented separately to the Executive Council.

The Advisory Committee is meanwhile encouraged to propose future members of the Ethics Committee to the Executive Council, and to forward short biographical profiles of service relevant to the Mission and Mandate of the Committee (both of which are available on the ICOM Website under the respective Standing Committees.

Bernice Murphy
Chairperson, ICOM Ethics Committee (April 2008)

Appendix (in English only) :

Report on ‘The Best in Heritage’ event in Dubrovnik (27-29 Sept.2007), and Chairperson’s participation in associated (new) Forum event: ‘Reclaiming Cultural Heritage’ (28 Sept.2007) – report originally for ICOM’s Executive Council, December 2007 meeting.

‘The Best in Heritage’ (Dubrovnik, 27-29 September 2007)

The Best in Heritage is now a well established museums/heritage award event associated with Dubrovnik, Croatia. The beautiful old quarter of Dubrovnik, still bearing its intact character as a mediaeval-Renaissance walled city, is a UNESCO World Heritage-listed site. The city is still rebuilding and repairing the scars after being directly attacked (and many citizens killed) during the horrific war of 1992 in the former Yugoslavia.

Dr Tomislav Šola, a museology professor in Zagreb, Croatia, had the audacious idea, some years ago, of establishing an annual ‘global heritage award’ event that could achieve the maximum effect with an economy of means. Dubrovnik seemed the appropriate environment for its realisation.

The ‘Best in Heritage’ project in Dubrovnik (in 2007 in its fifth year) is a gathering of presenters and projects that have already achieved awards elsewhere. They are recently completed projects that have been judged as outstanding, award-winning achievements in other events held by various museum communities and different regions of the world. This comparative gathering of award-winners is thus a synthesising event through which to explore and celebrate ‘the best’ in museums and cultural heritage care globally today.

A supreme award (and several others attached to the Croatian event from museum ‘industry-sources’) is made after three days’ evaluation of projects in Dubrovnik. This is achieved consensually by the community of professionals and others present. All (including the presenters) decide, in a straightforward voting process, which of the projects seems to demonstrate the most comprehensive qualities of innovation, imagination, progressive museology and socially effective results.

The atmosphere of this award is generous. All are deemed ‘winners’ simply by being present. The final laurel is thus a ‘highest among peers’ honour. Participants also have the opportunity to witness in one place some twenty of the most outstanding projects that demonstrate recent innovations in museums and heritage care around the world.

There were strikingly diverse entries in the September 2007 event. Among the eighteen presented was a film-based, multi-media interpretation of a romantic poet’s legacy in Hungary (literature is hardest of all to treat as the subject of museology). The vividly actualised project of the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms in London was presented by its director. An engaging presentation explained the ‘reinvention’ of the old Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels (utilising its outstanding dinosaur collection as the basis for inviting the public to assist in its transformation into a user-informed learning institution). There was a remarkably committed, small project devoted to the heyday of British steam-powered engines (one of which, still able to be activated, awed Charles Dickens) – this is the Kew Bridge Steam Museum, at Brentford, UK.

In interpretative invention and mediated engagement around an historic artefact, there was a small but brilliant project of digitising an historic 1550 *Map of Mexico* held in Uppsala, Sweden. This 'virtualised replica' opens up new conceptual platforms for narrative interpretation, and even cross-cultural history and counter-historical invention, engaging new on-line audiences today. Still reflecting the Aztec heritage in the detailed city plan (shown through tiny zoom-in pictograms for detailed browsing), the 1550 *Map of Mexico* has been the focus of great invention. It utilises the resources of the 'Internet 2.0' cultural phase of interactivity and co-creation of meaning. The digitisation process has incorporated the latest possibilities of a technologically driven interface: to provide access to the 'actual' qualities of an ancient object to a global audience, and to mobilise awareness about its context and heritage resources for contemporary historical interpretation. (See <http://cipher.uiah.fi/mexico_new/>)

An exemplary project (which many thought would win) was revealed in a fine presentation of the National Museum of Iceland, reopened in Reykjavik in 2004 after a complete refurbishment of its 1950s building and installations. A long-established institution (since 1863), the museum had lost its way, was run down, and no longer reached contemporary audiences. During a period of closure and refurbishment, the museum entirely rethought its mission and interpretive possibilities. A fundamentally new vantage-point on communication and engagement was needed, far from the approach of label-writing around a disparate collection of objects.

Having established the important narratives and themes that a national museum owed its contemporary nation in self-understanding, the museum staff then sought the most significant objects, materials and supports for such narratives (both beyond the museum's existing collections and within its holdings, stimulating collection development as well using existing resources). Such an approach is well worth studying by any museum with state, national or local community narrative responsibilities. (See <<http://www.thjodminjasafn.is/english>>)

I was invited to Dubrovnik by the President of ICOM-Europe, Udo Gösswald (along with Chedlia Annabi of AFRICOM, and Dr Guido Carducci of UNESCO) to participate in a new thematic event attached to 'The Best in Heritage'. We three speakers were to be engaged by Udo Gösswald (and the audience) in a round-table style forum entitled 'Reclaiming Cultural Property'. Discussion covered issues of illicit trafficking and threats to heritage today, and addressed legal and other international instruments (UNESCO Conventions, ethical codes) that are evolving in an environment of sharpened attention to repatriation, relationship-building with communities, and claims for restitution or other forms of recognition and assistance from communities of origin.

Which project finally 'won' the 'Best in Heritage' award this year? It was a brilliantly realised conversion of an old decommissioned hat factory – once the main industry and backbone of the local economy in a northern city of Portugal that had made the finest quality hats throughout much of the twentieth century. The local Town Hall decided to acquire the abandoned building in 1995, and turn it into a museum that explained a once-vital industry that shaped the social history of the town for a century.

The last employee of the hat factory became the first employee of the museum, since all the former workers still alive became primary sources for the history presented, and their voices supplied the label-texts explaining the industrial processes. The Hat Industry Museum project has even revived a limited-production capacity to make hats: now marketed to tourists and visitors who can be personally measured and place orders with the museum (an astute guarantee of an ongoing income stream for this beautifully interpreted industrial site). (See <www.ufp.pt>)

Old workers are welcomed to the Museum's canteen to play cards, as well as to assist in the continuing interpretation of social memory. The museum has become their club, in an area alongside the youth education centre that receives their grandchildren's generation to learn anew. This project has achieved maximum potential of all local social outcomes while functioning as a beautiful museum to attract tourists. No local government could hope for more than the Hat Industry Museum delivers. (See <www.thebestinheritage.com> for the 2007 Dubrovnik program and awards history)

And all praise to Prof. Tomislav Sola for establishing this wonderful annual event in Dubrovnik!

Bernice Murphy
Chairperson, ICOM Ethics Committee