

EGMUS statement on the new ICOM definition on museums

EGMUS, the European Group on Museum Statistics (in place, with its precursors, since 25 years) www.egmus.eu, is a group that meets annually and has worked since its inception on learning about, comparing and analyzing, and harmonizing museums statistics in the European countries – a work that is important for cultural reporting and for securing valuable results for museums and museum administrations in all these countries. The group cooperates with the Statistical Office of the EU and its work is recognized, and used, by several official authorities.

Because of the nature of our work, EGMUS has always been carefully following the work in ICOM on its internationally important definition of „museum“. Good and relevant definitions are, obviously, a core issue for any statistical endeavor and so, for the work of EGMUS and in its participating countries.

In the light of all this, EGMUS likes to offer the following observations for the attention of ICOM.

We feel that the new proposed ICOM definition „museum“ contains very valuable statements and observations on the full cultural role of museums. We do not want to give an opinion on the content of the proposed new definition, instead we would like to observe that the text offered here serves best as a vision statement, a statement of principles, and of general issues and guiding principles for museums worldwide – rather than as a pure, more technical definition.

Such a technical definition, in our opinion, should be as short as possible, emphasizing nothing but the most essential features of its objects, - and that also means, the features that clearly distinguish it from neighboring and other entities (in the case of museums, such as community centers, libraries, archives, education centers, etc.). This is essential for obtaining clarity in the first place, and certainly indispensable for any work that needs to ascertain, and precisely identify and count, its objects (entities), here: museums around the world. We should also not forget that in some countries and contexts, a definition obeying to some formal characteristics and to some degree of formal precision (without engaging too much in political statements) may well be needed, where e.g., the definition forms part of a country's national legislation or be acknowledged in other ways in a legal context.

Conforming to this, we would prefer to see the present ICOM museum definition to be carefully adapted, and the text of the presently proposed new definition to be incorporated into ICOM's basic documents at an appropriate place as a mission statement, or a general statement, for museums.

Thanking you sincerely for your attention to our observation, we should not like to conclude without expressing our sincere wishes for a good, fruitful and successful continued work of ICOM and the most successful use, and employing, of its „museum“ definition in all relevant contexts.

On behalf of the participants of the EGMUS 2019 conference (23 & 24 October 2019, Bucharest, Romania)

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