

The history of the ICOM #museumdefinition

2007

Article 3 – Definition of Terms

Section 1. Museum. A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

(ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly (Vienna, Austria, 24 August 2007)

2001

Article II – Definitions

1. A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.

- a. The above definition of a museum shall be applied without any limitation arising from the nature of the governing body, the territorial character, the functional structure or the orientation of the collections of the institution concerned.
- b. In addition to institutions designated as „museums“ the following qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:
 - i. natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
 - ii. institutions holding collections of and displaying live specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;
 - iii. science centres and planetaria;
 - iv. non-profit art exhibition galleries;
 - v. nature reserves; conservation institutes and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archives centres; natural parks;
 - vi. international or national or regional or local museum organisations, ministries or departments or public agencies responsible for museums as per the definition given under this article;
 - vii. non-profit institutions or organisations undertaking conservation research, education, training, documentation and other activities relating to museums and museology;
 - viii. cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);
 - ix. such other institutions as the Executive Council, after seeking the advice of the Advisory Committee, considers as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum, or as supporting museums and professional museum personnel through museological research, education or training.

(ICOM Statutes, amended by the 18th General Assembly (Barcelona, Spain, 6 July 2001)

1995

Article II – Definitions

1. A museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.

- a. The above definition of a museum shall be applied without any limitation arising from the nature of the governing body, the territorial character, the functional structure or the orientation of the collections of the institution concerned.
- b. In addition to institutions designated as „museums“ the following qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:
 - i. natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
 - ii. institutions holding collections of and displaying live specimens and plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;
 - iii. science centres and planetaria;
 - iv. conservation institutes and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archive centres;
 - v. nature reserves;
 - vi. international or national or regional or local museum organisations, ministries or departments or public agencies responsible for museums as per the definition given under this article;
 - vii. non-profit institutions or organisations undertaking research, education, training, documentation and other activities relating to museums and museology;
 - viii. such other institutions as the Executive Council, after seeking the advice of the Advisory Committee, considers as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum, or as supporting museums and professional museum workers through museological research, education or training.

(ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 16th General Assembly (The Hague, Netherlands, 5 September 1989) and amended by the 16th General Assembly (Stavanger, Norway, 1995))

1989

Article 2 – Definitions

1. A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.

- a. The above definition of a museum shall be applied without any limitation arising from the nature of the governing body, the territorial character, the functional structure or the orientation of the collections of the institution concerned.
- b. In addition to institutions designated as „museums“ the following qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:
 - i. natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
 - ii. institutions holding collections of and displaying live specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;
 - iii. science centres and planetaria;
 - iv. conservation institutes and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archive centres;
 - v. nature reserves;
 - vi. such other institutions as the Executive Council, after seeking the advice of the Advisory Committee, considers as having some or all the characteristics of a museum, or as supporting museums and professional museum workers through museological research, education or training.

(ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 16th General Assembly (The Hague, Netherlands, 5 September 1989)

1974

Section II – Definitions:

Article 3

A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.

Article 4

In addition to museums designated as such, ICOM recognizes that the following comply with the above definition:

- a. conservation institutes and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archive centres.
- b. natural, archaeological, and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature, for their acquisition, conservation and communication activities.
- c. institutions displaying live specimens, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria, vivaria, etc.
- d. nature reserves.
- e. science centres and planetariums.

(ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 11st General Assembly (Copenhagen, Denmark, 14 June 1974)

1961

Section II – Definition of a museum

Article 3

ICOM shall recognise as a museum any permanent institution which conserves and displays, for purposes of a study, education and enjoyment, collections of objects of cultural or scientific significance.

Article 4

Within this definition fall:

- a. exhibition galleries permanently maintained by public libraries and collections of archives,
- b. historical monuments and parts of historical monuments or their dependencies, such as cathedral treasuries, historical, archaeological and natural sites, which are officially open to the public,
- c. botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria, vivaria, and other institutions which display living specimens,
- d. natural reserves.

(ICOM Statutes, November 1961; doc.67-73)

1951

Article II – Definition

The word museum here denotes any permanent establishment, administered in the general interest, for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction groups of objects and

specimens of cultural value: artistic, historical, scientific and technological collections, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums. Public libraries and public archival institutions maintaining permanent exhibition rooms shall be considered to be museums.

(ICOM Statutes, July 1951)

1946

Article II – Section 2

The word „museums“ includes all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.