

Survey indicates ICOM-members prioritise new wordings.



Consultation about a new Museum Definition

Introduction

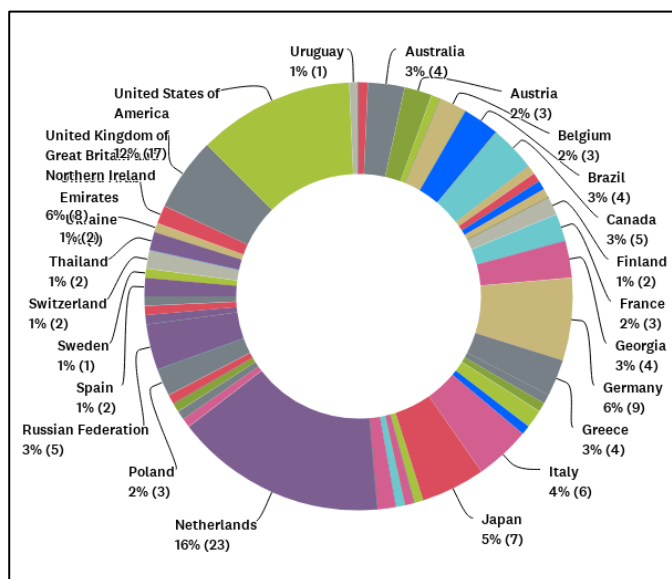
The ICOM Standing Committee for the Museum Definition requested all ICOM Committees to consult with their membership on what a new museum definition needs to contain and after consultation to submit **up to 20 key words/concepts** that are considered essential within a new museum definition.

On 19th of March 2021 the International Committee of Museum Management (INTERCOM) send out a survey **Consultation about a new Museum Definition** to 547 members. Besides reaching out to members directly, the survey was published on INTERCOM's website and LinkedIn Group page. INTERCOM choose to open the survey to all people with an interest in museums with the reason of a museum being conceived worldwide as a public institution. And with that in mind the public at large should be allowed to partake in a consultation about how to define a public institute. INTERCOM did not have sufficient resources and time to send out the survey in multiple languages to allow for a more inclusive approach.

Within 3 weeks until the deadline of 10th of April, 250 responses were received for which INTERCOM is incredibly grateful. 204 Surveys came back fully completed of which 144 were from ICOM members (71%) living in 45 countries worldwide. 60 Responses came from non-members (29%).

Out of the completed surveys by ICOM members 78 were also a member of INTERCOM. That is 38% of all fully completed surveys and 14% of the initial list of INTERCOM members whom we contacted directly. There was no substantial difference in the answers between ICOM and INTERCOM members, so all results presented here are based on the 144 surveys by ICOM members.

Of all completed surveys 96 responses came from respondents living in European countries (47%). From all ICOM members 78 responses came from people living in Europe (54%).

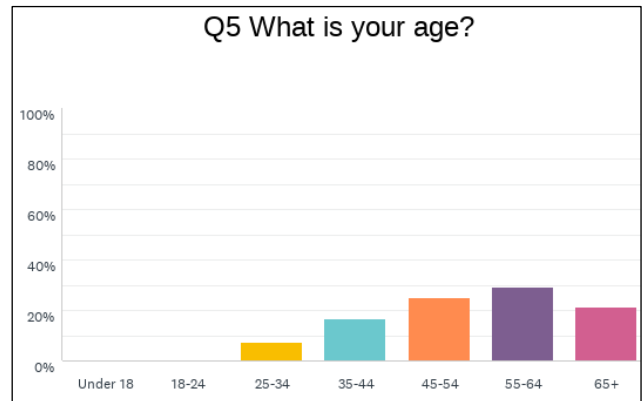


Considering the response volume and the heavyweight of European responses we share the most relevant outcome here as promised. But INTERCOM points out to **consider the outcomes as indicative of a direction towards a new definition** based on how 144 ICOM members, 71% of all fully completed surveys, responded to this consultation.

A new definition

Starting the survey, we first asked respondents if they agreed on changing the current definition. 66 ICOM members (46%) responded positive and 43 gave a neutral answer (30%). 35 members (24%) disagreed with changing the definition. Looking at a selection of respondents under the age of 44 years, the positive responses went up to 57%. This survey shows **the number of ICOM members preferring to change the definition is almost double of those preferring continuation of the current definition**. And the younger the members are, the more they lean towards change and a new definition.

Looking at a selection of only the responses from members living in European countries the number of positive responses is 45%, against 27% which answered the current definition is good enough. 28% Answered neutral. Maybe somewhat surprising but this survey shows there is **hardly any difference between the preference of European members versus members worldwide**; most ICOM members express a preference for changing the definition.



Top 20 Key words / concept score 'Extremely important'

As for the question which key words and concepts a new museum definition needs to contain, INTERCOM asked in the survey to classify a list of possible key words / concepts. Each word and concept could be marked on a 5-point scale: (O) Not important at all, (O) Somewhat important, (O) Important, (O) Very important and (O) Extremely important (key word / concept).

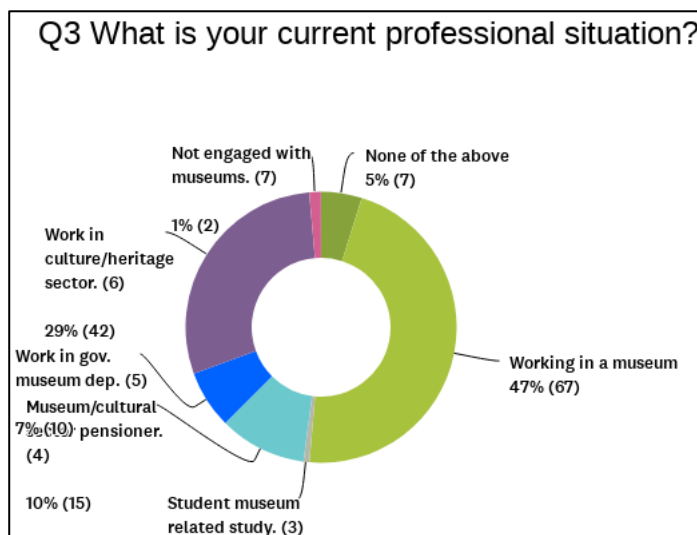
The words/concepts with the highest number of marks scored on only Extremely important make up **the list of the 20 TOP key words / concepts**. These are:

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) | for all people | 62 votes (57%) |
| 2) | an institution open to society | 58 votes (53%) |
| 3) | to conserve and preserve | 55 votes (50%) |
| 4) | for future generations | 53 votes (49%) |
| 5) | to work in active partnership with and for communities | 51 votes (47%) |
| 6) | for equal access | 50 votes (46%) |
| 7) | for enhancement of understandings of the world | 49 votes (45%) |
| 8) | to exhibit | 48 votes (44%) |
| 9) | a transparent and objective institution | 48 votes (44%) |
| 10) | inclusive | 47 votes (43%) |
| 11) | about the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment | 46 votes (42%) |
| 12) | to research | 45 votes (41%) |
| 13) | to educate | 43 votes (39%) |
| 14) | to safeguard diverse memories | 38 votes (35%) |
| 15) | a permanent institution | 38 votes (35%) |
| 16) | an institution accountable to stakeholders and the public | 38 votes (35%) |
| 17) | sustainable | 37 votes (34%) |

18)	an objective research institution	37 votes (34%)
19)	participatory	35 votes (32%)
20)	an agency of knowledge	35 votes (32%)

A relational perspective prevails.

Looking at the list of the top 20 Key words / concepts, we may conclude that just two key words from the current definition (conserve & preserve and exhibit) have made it to the 10 most important key words and another three (research, educate, permanent institution) in the lower ranking between 10 and 20. This under scribes not only the preference by the respondents for a new definition but also shows a preference for another viewpoint of defining a museum. Instead of what a museum does, ICOM-members in this survey by majority choose to define the museum with words explaining what a museum stands for and how it engages with its audiences. In defining the museum, you may notice a **shift from an internal perspective in the current definition to a more relational perspective for a new definition.** This we believe may be an essential point for ICOM Define to look further into.



And, also relevant... ‘Not important at all’

From all top 20 key words / concepts only two, ‘for all people’ (No. 1) and ‘for enhancement of understandings of the world’ (No. 7) did not received any marks with the response ‘Not important at all’.

The word/concept with the highest number of 72 answers ‘Not important at all’ was ‘A government department’ (66%), followed by 39 marks on ‘a public or private institution’ (36%).

The top 5 of words / concepts marked ‘Not important at all’ are:

1)	a government department	72 votes (66%)
2)	a public or private institution	39 votes (36%)
3)	a publicly funded institution	36 votes (33%)
4)	a public institution	30 votes (28%)
5)	an institution independent from government	27 votes (25%)

The museum’s organisation

INTERCOM as the international committee for museum management zoomed in on possible organisational descriptions. We like to point at the use of the word institute which comes back in 5 selected words/concepts in the top 20. The word institute may be seen as a nowadays robust and conservative description, but the word institute may also account for what makes a museum unique and different from other cultural organisations as a theatre, art space or concert hall.

If a museum is public or private, publicly funded, or not-for-profit is according to the respondents respectively 'Not relevant at all' or 'not relevant'. In the context of having to make choices as in this survey, these organisational funding descriptions are outranked by the choices to define a museum based on how a museum is relevant for audiences and what a museum does.

An institute open to society.

Finally, INTERCOM included a new concept in the list of words/concepts; 'an institution open to society'. Within this concept a museum is defined not only by an organisational entity, an institution, but also with relevance about how, in the most 'open' way, it holds a relationship with whom, society. It is interesting to find that this key concept scored 58 votes (53%) by all ICOM members and **the key concept 'an institution open to society' ended in the Top 20 list the second most chosen Key word / concept.**

For INTERCOM members this Key concept scored even higher in the survey as 56% marked it as 'Extremely important'. We like to advice ICOM Define on the base of this result to include the concept 'an institution open to society' in the possible wordings for a new definition and investigate this key concept further.

Strong engagement

From all 144 member responses, a large group of 80 people took the opportunity to answer the open question at the end of the survey. It is too much to go into this in

detail in this summary as all these individual contributions are seen as valuable. INTERCOM will share all individual responses with ICOM Define for their further interpretation. Besides that, we will publish the individual responses besides this summary on our website. INTERCOM does like to thank everyone who has been contributing to this survey. We wish the ICOM Define committee all success in the further development of a new museum definition.

This short report on the results of the survey is written by the International Committee for Museum Management for ICOM Define.

10 April 2021

For more information visit the INTERCOM website: <http://intercom.mini.icom.museum/>

