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THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSEUM ETHICS

This exposé should show how important Museum Ethics and the Interrelationship to the Functions of Museums are. Museum Ethics, defined by International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO) is an extraordinary part of the whole museum issues. It is also from international relevance because the functions/tasks of Museums and the ICOM Code of Ethics play an immense role in both each regional museums and the international and intercultural context.

In the recent decade was a lot of information about the development of the “museum-landscape” world-wide. These reports show explicitly the necessity of an ethical consideration. Ethics is really a common context for Museums, Heritage Sites, Tangible and Intangible Heritage, and also of all questions concerning Museums and Tourism. There is only one example: The “Louvre” as an unique institution in Paris represents the Arts in Museums all over the World. It is with its buildings, collections and presentations the embodiment of beauty and aesthetic. “Louvre” is also, besides of “Eiffelturm”, a “national symbol” of Paris/France. Nevertheless, there were some changes during the previous years. Museum stocks of the Louvre were now interchanged e.g. with museums in Abu Dhabi. Above that, the organizers of the Emirates paid high amounts even for the designation “Louvre”.

The writer of an item in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) with the title: “So sieht die Museumsinsel von morgen aus” focused in his contribution: ”Der Louvre ist erst der Anfang. Sandstrände, Golfplätze und Marinas hat das vom Öl reich gewordene Abu Dhabi schon. Jetzt kommt noch Kunst und Kunsterziehung dazu“¹. Really, the Louvre was only the starting-point for the international exchange of valuable collections – and the name “Louvre” as a former trademark was used in a completely commercial relationship. Meanwhile, there is also a “Louvre” in Metz/France and a Japanese restaurant with the name “Louvre” in Rothenburg/Germany.

In this concern we should particularly consider the explanation of the Czech museum-expert Zbynek Stránský who the consequences of globalisation to the Museums characterised: “In this concern happens something in the history of museums never happened before. ... All over the world the autonomy of culture is spoilt by economic thoughts. ... The relation of the museums efforts to both philosophy and science is coming to an end”².

Therefore we have to put the question how museums at the moment are developing and what we expect in regard to the survival of the museum as a very important institution of culture and education in future.

Usually, Museums are defined according to their functions and tasks. These are defined according to the statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). There is a common “definition” world-wide, included conceptions of different typology in a global context.

The request after a clear definition of a museum was in different epochs of museum-development estimated on different ways. The starting point for the creation of the term “museum” was in ancient times the “Mouseion” as a site, as a temple of the Muses, as the treasure-houses in Delphi and Olympia (Greece) and other sites – may be either libraries, schools or universities³. Besides, also the religious Chambers of Art in the Middle Ages were of great importance. By the end

¹ Hermann, Rainer: So sieht die Museumsinsel von morgen aus. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) Nr. 96, 25. April 2007, S. 42.

² Stránský, Zbynek: Die Museen im Osten im Umbruch. Märkte und Kontext. In: Museum aktuell, Nr. 115, Mai 2005, S. 5 und 6.

³ Vieregg, Hildegard: Museumswissenschaften. Eine Einführung („Museum Sciences. An Introduction). Paderborn 2006. In this concern should reminded to the Museum Alexandrinum or to the Museum Graecum or otherwise Museum Romanum.

of the Middle Ages and at the Royal Houses in the epoch of Renaissance developed different terms for the collections, as e.g. Chamber of Art, Chamber-Gallery, Galleria, Cabinet, Coin-Cabinet.

By the beginning of the 18th century some persons responsible used the term “Museum”, and they wanted to define this institution precisely. There are particular representatives as e.g. Michael Bernhard Valentini (1704)⁴ and Caspar Friedrich Neickelius (1727)⁵. Neickelius mentions in his opus almost all of the characteristics and tasks which are relevant for a museum also in contemporary times. There is an additional term given in the famous Encyclopaedia of Johann Georg Krünitz (1728-1796). He defined the museum already 1805 particularly as an institution accessible for the public⁶.

Further the Museum was 1946 in its Constitutions characterized by the recently founded International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO). There were some modifications in 1956, 1961, 1974 (on the basis of the “Declaration of Santiago de Chile”, 1972), 1989, 1995 and 2001⁷. The ICOM Code of Ethics The “ICOM Code of Professional Ethics” is the most important frame for all the tasks and challenges of a museum⁸. According to this a museum is “a permanent non-profit institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public ...“ (ICOM Statutes, article 2, para 1).

Even until to the year 1970 was given priority to the acquisition of the collections, conservation and questions on museum history. Many years later in the museums-conceptions was given more importance to presentation, exhibition, communication and particularly education.

What we need today is a further development of the definition of a museum – related to an ethical and intellectual basis. Above that should be a definition related to the development of society. This definition should easily be understandable also by non-experts. It should also provide an ethical rule and a “catalogue of values” for the museum⁹.

As we already have seen on Stránskýs statement there arises an international problem related to the consideration that a museum could serve as a “source producing money”. This is definitely against the intentions of ICOM and the Professional Code of Ethics and contrary to the intention of a museum as a “non-for profit-organization”.

The International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) proposed in the “Declaration of Calgary” (2005) a modified definition of a museum: “The museum is an institution for the benefit of society, devoted to exploring and understanding the world by researching, preserving and communicating, notably through interpretation and exhibition, tangible and intangible evidence that constitutes the heritage of humanity. It is a non-for-profit-institution”¹⁰ Until now this definition of a museum is the most recent.

In this concern the fact a museum is a non-commercial organization includes innovative paradigms as e.g. a description of recent tasks of a museum included the so-called “virtual museum”¹¹.

⁴ Valentini, Michael Bernhard: *Museum Museorum oder vollständige Schau=Bühne aller Materialien und Specereyen ...*, Frankfurt 1704.

⁵ Neickelius, Caspar Friedrich: *Museographia oder Anleitung zum rechten Begriff und nützlicher Anregung der Museorum oder Raritätenkammern*. Leipzig/Breslau 1727.

⁶ Blank, Melanie/Debelts, Julia: Quellen- und Literaturverzeichnis. In: *Was ist ein Museum? („What is defined as a museum?“)*. Wien 2002, S. 197-204.

⁷ http://www.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html.

⁸ International Council of Museums (Ed.): *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums/Code de Déontologie de l'ICOM pour les Musées/Código de Deontología del ICOM para los Museos*, Paris 2002 and International Council of Museums, ICOM-Deutschland, ICOM-Österreich, ICOM-Schweiz, Berlin/Wien/Zürich 2003.

⁹ Murphy, Bernice: *The Definition of the Museum. From Specialist Reference to Social Recognition and Service*. ICOM NEWS no.2, 2004. Bernice Murphy at that time was one of the Vice Presidents of International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO).

¹⁰ Mairesse, François/Maranda, Lynn/Davis, Ann (Eds.): *Définir le musée/Defining the museum*. Mariemont/Belgium 2005.

¹¹ Viereg, Hildegard on behalf of International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM /ICOM/UNESCO): *Museology and Presentation. Original or Virtual?* Cuenca/Ecuador and Galápagos Islands 2002.

Anyway, keeping this in mind we have to examine if a “virtual-museum” ever could fulfil the many tasks of a non-virtual real museum: Collecting, preserving, documentation, presentation, communication, education. Besides, is to check whether a “virtual museum” is a public institution with a real building and the possibility to be visited by audience of every group of society. If we examine all of those problem we will come to the result that a so-called “virtual museum” is only a non-real, virtual space or a digital/virtual equipment in a real museum. This works under specific virtual conditions and multi-media applications in order to support the understanding and to promote knowledge of the visitors. “Virtual museums” are “objects” themselves – or they present objects on a digital or interactive way.

By the influences of “the virtual” yet the conception of a traditional museum is going to be changed. There are new possibilities for documentation and presentation (data-bases) – and without any doubt potentials to improve the basic tasks of a museum by these new methods. To conclude: The “virtual museum” cannot be understood as a museum in the classical sense. Much more it is – following Jaron Lanier – “virtual reality as technology”. It helps the users to interact – starting from a real space and time – with a computer – or to create an artificial three-dimensional environment.

All of the tasks and functions of a museum are closely connected to ethical questions. Therefore I will now relate to these issues. The “ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums”¹² includes the most essential strategies related to the acquisition of collections for museums. This means a certain collection-policy, the problems of sponsoring, questions according to the co-operation of museums concerning the collection-policy and also donations, the advancement or the improvement of the attraction of museums by temporary exhibitions. Under respect of the objects it is not allowed to lean any objects to commercial or to use them to private purposes – but much more only under the condition of the intentions of science, research or teaching and education¹³.

The collecting of objects is up to now the basic task of a museum. Only with the help of a systematic permanent collection it is possible to design a museum. But it is always to check if the objects of collecting are on the one hand adequate to the structure of a collection and much more on the other hand to the human rights. Let me give an example that was world-wide discussed: In the ice-region of the Highlands of the Andes/Argentina (6700 m above sea-level) more than a decade ago (1999) bodies of three offered Inka-children were discovered by archaeologists. All of them were excellently preserved over many centuries because the temperature in this height didn’t damage the corpses. Because of the spectacular discovery of these corpses firstly was discussed to show them in a Museum for Archaeology (Museo de Arqueología SALTA de Alta Montaña (MAAM) as “extraordinary objects”. This museum built for the findings was particularly devoted to the history of this discovery in the Highlands of the Andes.¹⁴

The site was a relevant “High Altitude Sanctuary” where the ritual known as “Capacocha” was presented as an offering to the gods. Finally, it was decided only to present and to show the circumstances of the expedition and discovery and many of the material objects – as clothes, shoes, tools etc.) – but not the bodies of the children because of the respect of human remains¹⁵ and the human dignity. They are not “objects to display”.

In any case is pay attention to ethnic questions, religious or ethnic groups from whom the objects are originated¹⁶.

In a similar way is to deal with “material of sacred significance, museums or sacred sites”¹⁷ as e.g. the environment of the Ayers Rock with objects of the Aborigines (Australia), the Ming Tombs (China) or remains in the catacombs of Rome (Italy).

¹² International Council of Museums (Ed.): ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 2006./ International Council of Museums, ICOM-Deutschland, ICOM-Österreich, ICOM-Schweiz (Hg.): ICOM Ethische Richtlinien für Museen (Code of Ethics for Museums) (translator: Frank Süßdorf), Berlin/Wien/Zürich 2003.

¹³ International Council of Museums, p.9.

¹⁴ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 4.3.

¹⁵ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 3.7.

¹⁶ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 2.5.

In this concern shall particularly focused on the research in the only several international research-museums in the era of Natural Sciences which have to fulfil scientific and most specific tasks. Their collections are in the best way “primary and genuine sources” with a relationship to many applied disciplines and special knowledge.

The research in the museums starts from the collection of objects from the nature and relates to phenomena of shape, space and time and on the implication of history.

Living collections should be taken care in a specific way¹⁸.

As Wilhelm Schäfer described there were three big stock takings in the history of Natural Sciences. All of them resulted from certain temporary, political and economic constellations of world-civilization – not even defined by single scientists or research-groups: The first stocktaking relates to the early voyages of discovery and economic relations of the at that time recognized world between 1680 and 1820. Those were followed by a lot of important monographs and reports about expeditions whose highlights were those as of the famous Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859).

The second world-wide relates to world-trade, the overseas colonies, the world-wide net for intercommunication and the world-wide shipping in the space of time between 1860 and 1910¹⁹.

The third recording of objects from the nature on the earth as a whole started from 1950 and was carried out by both many nations and cultural institutions – as e.g. UNESCO. This was particularly initiated by constellations and problems related to the mankind as a whole: population explosion, development aid policy, protection of nature and environment.

Collections of museums are always are an important contribution to the cultural memory. But there is always to remind to the ethical basis of collections. In this concern we have also to think about collections of the history of politics, economics, the everyday-life, social history, art history and the history of the techniques²⁰.

Besides, the projects on research, but much more the focus on the “social mission” of a museum, particularly explained by the Statutes and the “Code of Ethics for Museums” led to both to collect and to preserve the World Heritage in a much more intensive way than ever before, because collections are also the inheritance of people.

1998 started the international initiative for the “Proclamation of the Masterpieces on the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”²¹ that is in a specific way connected with museums, monuments and memorial sites. Related to the collection-policy resulted not only objects or the “material” heritage but much more also of the “immaterial” heritage. This has to be included in the Heritage of Humanity (witnesses of music, dance, theatre, sources, literature etc.). Therefore it is the museum as a place where can be given the answers to many of the questions of human beings.

Research of objects as representatives of culture and information is also a basic and central task of a museum. According to the museum-expert Willi Xylander (Senckenberg-Museum, Frankfurt/Main) there are “minimal standards” related to seven sub-divisions:

- The collections as guarantees of preservation, documentation and object-identification;
- Scientific and administrative personnel at museums. The scientific staff with the possibility for research and commitment for publication of scientific results for the audience²²;
- The improvement of the value of a collection by the promotion of research-projects;
- The support of research by the technical equipment of a museum;

¹⁷ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 2.5/4.3.

¹⁸ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 2.7/2.25.

¹⁹ Schäfer, Wilhelm: Naturhistorische Museen. In: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hg.): Denkschrift Museen. Bonn/Boppard 1974, S. 63/64.

²⁰ Preißler, Dietmar: Museumsobjekt und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Anspruch und Wirklichkeit beim Aufbau einer zeithistorischen Sammlung. In: Deutscher Museumsbund (Hg.): Standards für Museen. Staatshaftung. In: Museumskunde Bd. 70 1/05, S. 47.

²¹ http://www.unesco.org/heritage/html_eng/index_en.shtml

²² ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 4.6.

– The scientific exchange on the occasion of Meetings and co-operation on inter-institutional projects;

– The possibility for researchers to use scientific sources and literature;

– Last but not least, the fulfilment of ethical criteria as “rules of good scientific practice”²³.

Documentation in this kind is closely connected with research. Nevertheless, it should be considered that particularly documentation is related to all of the functions and tasks of a museum: to collecting, preserving, documentation, research, presentation, communication, education²⁴.

The documentation-experts Monika Hagedorn-Saupe and Axel Ermert open high ethical challenges to the documentation-system of a museum. The object has to be identified without any doubt. If it’s lost or stolen there must be observers and eye-witnesses. Objects have to be identified because of their physical shape and identity. Besides, there are many museum-intern tasks as e.g. the precise description of an object or the hierarchic position of an item in the collection of a museum. Very much helpful means are Inventory-books, or a computer data-base that may be useful in a multiple way²⁵.

If we talk about museum-research we have also to think about monographs and specific publications, which can be used on numerous museums, universities and on other institutions for education at all. If we think in an ethical way there is also to consider that small museums or community museums scarcely don’t have the possibility for research and publications. Therefore the larger museums, with more scientific competence and financial possibilities should always think about the opportunity to create publications which are also useful for smaller Regional or Local Museums. The task of producing publications is therefore very important.

Preserving

Preserving is also one of the basic standards of a museum. There are a lot of specific points included: museum security²⁶ as not only a basic but also an ethics standard, conservation and restoration. If somebody in a museum neglects the security, she/he endangers the objects as cultural heritage. Sometimes objects were stolen because of the ignorance of security-rules – not only in countries where conflicts of war is the real danger, much more also in middle-European countries, as in Vienna/Austria, the Eremitage St. Petersburg/Russia or museums in Norway. In each case was not taken care enough for the security of the objects. There are many other examples related to the transport of objects, destruction and other endangering.

Additionally is to be paid attention to the capability of buildings to keep a museum.

In many museums of the world the care for museum-objects is insufficient because of the building.

Conservation

Conservation is particularly related to single objects. The Ethical Rules of ICOM explain this in detail: “The recognition of cultural and physical integrity and authenticity of single objects, specimens or collections and the respect for them are the basis of each measure on conservation”²⁷. In this context works of religious should be mainly mentioned art because of their traditional and cultural value. The main focus is on an unadulterated preservation of the object. Therefore it is an ethic obligation to show superficial changes or additions to the object clearly – compared with its authentic physical nature. Only under this condition the object is a true representative of the historical significance²⁸.

²³ Xylander, Willi E.R.: Mindeststandards für Forschung an Museen. In: *Museumskunde*. Hg. Vom Deutschen Museumsbund: Standards für Museen, Staatshaftung. Bd. 70. 1/05.

²⁴ Hagedorn, Monika/Ermert, Axel: Dokumentation – Grundaufgabe des Museums. In: *Deutscher Museumsbund (Hg.): Standards für Museen, Staatshaftung. Museumskunde Bd. 70 1/05, S. 66.*

²⁵ Hagedorn, M./Ermert, A., pp. 67-68.

²⁶ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 8.7.

²⁷ International Council of Museums: Code of Ethics for Museums (2003), p. 12.

²⁸ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 2.24.

Nevertheless, until to the beginning of 20th century a work of art was hardly accepted as an at the same time historical source. Contrary in present times it is the most important aim of restoration to preservation of objects in their former material substance and quality.

To fulfil and to keep the minimum standards of preservation “structural methods for museum preservation”²⁹ have to be set up. But these are only to be used if the qualification of museum staff is guaranteed. Besides, education and professionalism of museum-staff if of great importance³⁰.

Museum staff has a great responsibility related to the public. Collecting, preserving, researching are not end in itself. Rather more all of these labours are undertaken directed to the aim of bringing the cultural heritage close to the audience. Visitors of museums should be enabled to become acquainted with the cultural memory and historical knowledge, and receive ideas for their individual education.

The Statutes of ICOM focus these aspects in a specific way explaining the museum as “an institution in the service of society and its development”.

Presentation

Presentation is also related to the Ethics³¹. In this concern is to distinguish between traditional presentations, temporary exhibits, moving exhibitions, storage-presentations sometimes supported by virtual equipment. The “computer-equipment” usually enables information about each object and helps to fulfil the interests of visitors individually. There is this extraordinary example of a storage-presentation in Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that opens on this way the stocks to the public. Both, presentation and interpretation is a professional duty. Carefully selected objects have to be presented in an understandable way for all groupings of society.

Museums as Places of Education

At the first time 1904 Museums were mentioned as seats of learning³². Related to the target groups of museums was focused not only on Museums of Arts but also on Museums of Applied Arts and Trade. For those a precise plan was developed related to both the educational tasks and the methods of education³³. Also the famous Art Museums in Berlin and in other cities became places of learning supported by the pedagogical reform-movement und the tendencies of democratisation of the museums. Both, the Museum staff and the teachers discovered the working-class. As a contribution of ethical relevance the Welfare Association initiated guided tours in order to enable the working-class to become acquainted with the cultural treasures of museums in Berlin.

This idea developed was during the 20th century enlarged in manifold ways: the participation of not only the educated classes in the cultural heritage, the Ecomuseums up to the involvement of indigenous people in the preparation of museum-conceptions³⁴. One of the best examples from all over the world is the “National Museum of the American Indian” situated on the Museum Mall of Washington opened on September 21, 2004 as one of the most recent museums in the USA.

Already in the foundation-documents was in detail explained that this museum “should talk an individual language” for the indigenous peoples of America. The “Welcome Plaza” with the “polar star” forms the centre of this outstanding museum. Abstractions of nature and astronomy are included. The museum-building itself shows with its sand-colours and its outlines many associations to the earth and the mythical world of the indigenous Indians.

The team of architects was advised by the ethnical groups of Cherokees, Navajos, Blackfoot and Hopi. The designer-team had many confidential talks with indigenous people in order to choose

²⁹ Götz, p. 55.

³⁰ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 8./8.2/8.4.

³¹ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 4.2.

³² Schriften der Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen. Nr. 25: Die Museen als Volksbildungsstätten. Ergebnisse der 12. Konferenz für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen. Berlin 1904.

³³ Grunow, C.: Deutsches Gewerbe-Museum zu Berlin. Berlin 1867, p. 5.

³⁴ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, 6./6.1.

colours, materials and symbols related to the Indian aesthetic. In this context the Potomac River plays a particularly important role.

All of the presentations are aimed to the wisdom of and traditional knowledge of cosmology, philosophy, the structure of the Universe and the spiritual relationships between the mankind and the nature. All of these metaphors give views to the insight of the life of the indigenous people. Besides, it shows the equal value of the cultures of the world.

At present the museum has – according “ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums” and all of those rules – really an important task particularly in order to develop its educational function and the inter-action with all the groups of our world-wide society. Museum Ethics is one of the most significant tools to deal with all of other the tasks and functions of a Museum.

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WORLD HERITAGE AND EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

Are we now in a “Multiversum” – instead of a “Universum”? This is an important question in the book “Science” of the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung”, published on March 23, 2014¹. This is also the problem when we consider the development of Museums and World Heritage Sites concerning educational intentions. The laws and conditions have changed rapidly, the so-called Universum has enlarged to a “Multi-Universal”, the signals which come from the traditional museum have to be explained in a contemporary way and the recent observations show us on the one hand all of the issues related to Museums and Heritage Sites as an integral source, and on the other hand we should use them for new perspectives. Nevertheless, let’s start with the History of the World Heritage Concept.

The creation of a list with the “Seven Wonders of the World” in the ancient world is not very difficult. These were distinguished constructions or Works of Art which spread a great majesty. The Pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, the religious symbol of the Olympic Zeus created by the famous master of sculpture, the great Phidias, the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos, the Colossus of Rhodos and the Lighthouse on the Island of Patras. Those involved the so-called “Magic Seven”, apparently the most important buildings in the ancient times. Further periods added other Wonders of the World – as for example the Colosseum in Rome/Italy or the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul/Turkey.

The first of these Wonders of the World has been existed than almost five thousands of years. It is the pyramids of Gizeh in Egypt. Particularly the Pyramids are until now the eminent criterion for a “Wonder of the World”².

The Declaration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites – is a kind of continuation of this early sites related to both cultural and natural heritage. History of the World Heritage Concept and the UNESCO-Conventions

The term “Cultural Heritage” dates back to Henri-Baptiste Grégoire (1787-1831), bishop of Blois in France. After the French Revolution he accused 1794 in an essay the damaging and destruction of works of art. Already since 1798 the term “cultural heritage” was included in a questionnaire of the Académie française.

The World Heritage focused on UNESCO World Heritage Sites has its manifestation in the uniqueness as an exceptional Site of Culture or Nature. This must be linked to the Memory of the

¹ Von Rauchhaupt, Ulf: „Sind wir nun im Multiversum? In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung. Wissenschaft. 23. März 2014. Seite 51.

² Khuon, Ernst von: Die Sieben Weltwunder. Stuttgart/Zürich/Wien 1969. pp.6-7.