

Giovanni Pinna  
Viale Cassiodoro 1  
20145 Milano  
Tel. & Fax 0039 02 4801 4352  
Cell. 0039.335 700 8899  
e-mail [giovanni@pinna.cx](mailto:giovanni@pinna.cx)  
[www.giovanni.pinna.cx](http://www.giovanni.pinna.cx)

To the Chairpersons of National Committees  
To the Chairpersons and Secretaries of International Committees  
To the Chairpersons and Secretaries of Regional Organisations

Dear colleagues,

At the last meeting of the Advisory Committee you accepted my candidature for the presidency of ICOM for 2004-2007 and you have been briefly informed about my *curriculum vitae* and my thoughts regarding our Association. It is, therefore, my duty to provide you with further details on what I intend to do for ICOM, if elected President.

I do not believe that major or radical changes are necessary. Indeed, I am convinced that ICOM is a great and solid organisation, with its high number of members, the professionalism represented in it, the participation of 116 nations, the activities it carries out in favour of the museum profession, in defence of cultural heritage and in favour of cooperation between museums and museum professionals. The actions carried out by the International Committees in their respective spheres of interest, the activities of the National Committees and the Regional Organisations in their areas of jurisdiction, the cooperation with the Affiliated International Organisations, and the activities performed directly by the General Secretariat involve museums and museum professionals in all the world. Actions such as the fight against illegal trade and the drawing up of documents such as the professional Code of Ethics have had an effect throughout the world; ICOM's definition of a museum is known and accepted almost universally and, in many countries, has become part of legislation.

### **Authoritativeness and legitimacy for ICOM**

I believe that the role of president of ICOM must consist above all in developing to the utmost the lines of action adopted by the General Assembly.

The 2001-2007 Strategic Plan, adopted by the General Assembly on 6th July 2001 in Barcelona, sets three main objectives, which I wish to recall:

**Objective 1:** ICOM is recognised as the international leader in the museum field, and is a respected voice on issues affecting protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage.

**Objective 2:** ICOM advances the sharing of professional knowledge and museum practice internationally through mutual assistance, and actively encourages new models of collaboration.

**Objective 3:** ICOM achieves a dynamic, supple and consistent framework for communications and advocacy on behalf of museums internationally.

In the following pages I will explain the action I believe should be undertaken to pursue these three objectives, the necessary means for this purpose and the

strategies which must be adopted; finally I will try to identify the present weaknesses in ICOM which need remedying.

In brief I feel it is necessary to put into effect a series of actions designed to create an "Association culture" which would give ICOM greater authoritativeness and, consequently, legitimacy to intervene at the highest cultural and organisational levels regarding museum life, the museum profession and the protection of cultural heritage.

### **A crisis?**

We are all familiar and in agreement with ICOM's actions and take part in its activities. However, we cannot ignore the fact that today ICOM is suffering from an identity crisis which is clear from a tendency in its recent activity, typical of all organisations or companies in difficulty, to resort to frequent and, what is more, unjustified changes in the organisational structure and *modus operandi*.

An organisation, be it a manufacturing company, a state organisation, a museum or a non-profit association, resorts to frequent and unjustified changes when in difficulty (for example due to a reduction in production capacity, little faith in its own product or action, the incapacity to meet market demands or face new competitors, etc.) and unable to find the right answer to its problems. It tries to hide its incapacity behind a flurry of activity and frequent and unjustified changes which, being unnecessary, do not help overcome the crisis and indeed make it worse, in most cases because of increased bureaucracy.

In recent years, and not always with unanimous agreement, ICOM has adopted a policy based on the search for new forms of organisation, and modifications of the Association's rules, at various levels and in various directions. The result has been the start of procedures to modify its fundamental documents (the Statute, the Code of Ethics and the definition of Museum), and the multiplication of operative structures with advisory and reforming roles. Thus new permanent or semi-permanent working groups have been created (Standing Committee on Finances and Resources, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs and Properties, Nominations Committee, Task Force on National Committees and Regional Organisations, Working Group on the Use of Languages, Working Group on the Revision of the Statutes), in addition to other already existing more or less active and important groups and committees (ICOM Reform Task Force, Ethic Committee, Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues).

Quite apart from the financial costs that all this involves for ICOM, I feel that the medium term result of this excessive search for change, on numerous fronts, by working groups which are not always inter-coordinated, may be ICOM's loss of homogeneity and compactness, with effects on the efficacy of its cultural action. It is, in any case, a sign that ICOM is turning in on itself, tending to become self-referential and shrinking from facing the great social and cultural changes that in recent years have shaken the museum world, guided the cultural policies of many countries, changed the museum profession and the relationship between institutions and individual professionals, and had a direct influence on the society's perception of cultural heritage.

I do not mean that we should not make changes which are truly indispensable for our Association to work properly, however, I am convinced that at present there is no need for the global revolution that ICOM is making in all operative departments and in all documents. Above all, I believe that every proposal for change must be preceded by an investigation into the impact it would have, both on the individual members of ICOM and on the activities of the Association as a whole.

### **Remembering our traditions**

ICOM does not need to drastically change its organisational structure, but it must, however, channel its efforts in three directions: to make its actions more incisive, raise its profile, and reinforce its role as leader in world museology, renewing the dialogue and collaboration between large and small museums, large and small nations which underpinned its foundation.

In 1946, when it was founded as a Non-Governmental Organisation, ICOM inherited an important role. It became successor to the Office International des Musées of the League of Nations, a Governmental Organisation which between the 1920s and 30s promoted studies on museums, defended and increased the prestige of the museum profession, stimulated the debate on the meaning and social and cultural function of museums, and spread this debate through the pages of the magazine *Mouseion* which contained articles by the most eminent museologists of the time. These historical and cultural roots underlie the important task that ICOM undertook in a world devastated by the Second World War; a world which had to rebuild destroyed museums, mourn lost cultural heritage, and justly resolve the dispersion of objects of art and science which every war brings. While governments created the United Nations as a place for political debate and UNESCO as an organisation for world culture and education, ICOM set itself the task of creating an international community, within which museums or individual directors, conservators and technicians could develop mutual cooperation, over and above individual interests, so that each could share in the knowledge of the others.

ICOM could have been a utopia, but it was not. Over the years, ICOM developed and became an important means of spreading knowledge and support for those institutions or countries which needed it. Throughout the world newly independent countries, and, economically speaking, the most disadvantaged societies found in ICOM a point of reference and support. In ICOM small and large museums sat round the same table and spoke the same language; in the first decades of the Association's life there was not the detachment between large museums and the rest of the museum world that today has led to the large museums defining themselves as "Universal Museums", as if to underline a boundary line based, not only on size, but on a different place in the world, a different cultural vocation.

### **Creation of a shared "Association culture"**

This brief historical *excursus* highlights what I believe must be considered the strong point of our Association: the fact that it is a community in which the members share the same ideals and hopes, similar fears and problems, and that, as a community, it has a greater value than that of the individual members, a surplus value which all its members benefit from.

The exchange of experiences, dialogue between different cultures, and sharing of the same ethical code are just some of the elements which create ICOM's "surplus value", an "added value" which can be summed up in three concepts: shared culture, authoritativeness and legitimacy. That is to say ICOM must create an "Association culture" which provides the authoritativeness and legitimacy to discuss museums and their problems everywhere, in every situation and with everyone.

However, in order for these three concepts to take form, ICOM must not be merely a gathering of individuals who feel independent of the global organisation; on the contrary it is indispensable that being a member of ICOM acquires a sense of belonging. In the same way the National Committees, International Committees and

Regional Organisations must not consider themselves separate bodies, but must identify themselves in the general organisation and contribute to the growth in the Association's authoritativeness and legitimacy.

The National Committees, International Committees and Regional Organisations are the working bodies of the Association, they are the means of contact between ICOM and single members, be they individuals or museums. They are the workshop in which cultural debate takes place – at local level for some, at international level for others, in each specific scientific sector – they are non-bureaucratic places where culture is processed, in which, from a museum point of view, lie the premises for the protection of heritage, for the social use of museums and for the cultural growth of mankind. The committees create their own culture and must pour it back into the Association to build an “Association culture” and thus guarantee ICOM's authoritativeness and legitimacy. They must not, then, be separate bodies – a danger which I can see emerging in some reform documents. Their scientific and cultural autonomy must always blend in a shared moment, when the multiple facets of the Association come together to create a single culture: the “Association culture” which must be a “shared culture” in as much as it does not cancel out single individualities, but conserves their specific characteristics as parts of a common heritage.

Apart from the administrative duties that the Statute entrusts to them, the Executive Council and the Advisory Committee are called upon to perform a delicate act which is fundamental for the life of the Association: mediation between different cultures and experiences to create unity in diversity. It is an act for which, of course, they must account to the highest body of the association: the General Assembly.

### **Cultural action and organisation of activities**

The authoritativeness and legitimacy which result from the birth of an “Association culture” are important elements, which have effects not only on the level of ICOM's institutional activities, but also on an economic level: they increase the Association's credibility, give it bargaining power with possible interlocutors and help it obtain funding. In turn, greater credibility, stronger bargaining power and increased funding make the Association's actions more effective and members' participation in its activities easier, and they contribute to a further increase in credibility. It is a virtuous circle which must be set in motion starting from the cultural level and acting on the organization of activities.

Acting on a cultural level means putting into effect a series of actions designed to create the “Association culture”, and make it present and visible not only within ICOM itself but also outside it: pressing for scientific debate; using its own organs to take part directly in the global debate on museums; strengthening its publishing activities, creating a true and proper scientific organ to flank the ICOM News; creating an efficient documentation centre, recovering the dispersed heritage of books and making it available to ICOM members all over the world via mail or internet; re-launching the role of the archives on wider bases, rendering them able to conserve and make available the documentation regarding the work of the committees, the Executive Council, the Advisory Committee and working groups, and to organise and conserve the documentation regarding discussions which take place on ICOM's discussion lists; finally, creating an efficient press office, capable of talking with the media of very different countries.

Working on the organisation of ICOM's activities means making choices and producing credible programmes which can really be carried out with available funds.

It means that each of ICOM's activities must comply with four actions: identification of objectives, choice of priorities, pursuit of results, evaluation of efficacy. ICOM cannot and must not be an association which limits itself to spreading what happens in the world, it must create its own intervention structures capable of providing technical and scientific support where and whenever it is needed.

On this point I wish to draw your attention to the fact that ICOM's action to protect heritage cannot be limited to the publication of red lists or lists of stolen materials – worthy though these actions may be – it must go further. In this sector ICOM has a significant role to play and can do so in two directions, both of which are important.

Thanks to its presence in almost all countries in the world, ICOM is able to gather information on the health of the world's museums and the collections within them. ICOM must evaluate this information to organise protective action in collaboration with other partners, first and foremost UNESCO, to which ICOM is related, so to speak, by family ties. If the tragic events for the integrity of heritage in recent years are well-known, we must reflect on the fact that there also exist heritages which are at risk in situations we are unaware of, because they are not brought to our attention by wars or natural disasters. In this setting, ICOM's role as an information centre can become essential for the protection of world heritage and I hope that collaboration between ICOM and UNESCO will become stronger and that ICOM will be asked to join the consultants to the World Heritage Centre and the Direction-General for Culture.

The other direction to take is that of direct intervention, both on a cultural and practical level, i.e. "in the field", through the organisation of a immediate response task force or a network of professionals ready to go into action wherever crises for the integrity of cultural heritage arise.

On the one hand, then, I imagine ICOM as a great archive gathering information from all over the world on the health of museums; processing the information and transmitting it to governments, local associations, international organisations and all those capable of intervention. On the other hand, I imagine ICOM as a working force, capable of intervening and providing technical and scientific support to museums in difficulty, thanks to the collaboration of its members, the National Committees, International Committees and Regional Organisations.

Naturally, all of this cannot happen unless some contingent problems are solved: first and foremost a new and fitting headquarters for ICOM, as all these actions require working space, and because it is immoral to permit the association's employees to work in unhealthy and inadequate spaces and for members to be obliged to go down into a basement in order to consult the archives.

### **Abolition of pockets of marginalisation**

Finally, I wish to mention one last important point. The financial difficulties resulting from excessive bureaucracy, limited bargaining power with possible financiers and other contingent reasons (e.g. the acquisition or maintenance of a headquarters for the secretariat's offices), not only produce a reduction of overall activities, but, above all, risk creating ever larger pockets of marginalisation within the association. Indeed, while for many members taking part in ICOM's work, the working groups and international committees is becoming increasingly more difficult, because ever more costly, ICOM has increasingly less resources available to guarantee the active participation of the more economically disadvantaged. The growth of these pockets of marginalisation on the one hand and, on the other hand, the

distancing of large museums from rich countries (in substance if not in form) risk resulting in a provincialisation which would cancel out much of ICOM's value and would lead it almost inevitably to withdraw into itself.

Giovanni Pinna

Milan march 6, 2004