

Opening Remarks

Beate Reifenscheid, President ICOM Germany

Welcome to our ICOM members from all over the world, especially the travellers from far, such as from Australia, Canada, Tanzania and China, who are all going to contribute their perspectives during our conference.

Warm welcome of course to all members from Europe and our partners and co-organizers from ICOM Europe; especially it's Chair Louis Raposo from Lisbon and Monika Hagedorn-Saupe from Berlin, who herself is member of the board and to our Deputy Major for Culture, Margit Theis-Scholz.

Together with Luis Raposo we have been planning since last year this joint conference of ICOM Europe and ICOM Germany and soon came to the decision, that the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz would be a fantastic location to host this conference. History has left some remarkable traces here.

Latest since the Romans have been settled here more than 2000 year ago, the city has been a melting area for various cultures influences. Due to its perfect location right at the river banks of the Rhine and Mosel transportation and exchange of goods has been a unique advantage of intercultural communication since ever. In 1798 the city has been declared as capital of the "Département de Rhin-et-Moselle" and after the "Peace of Lunéville" Coblenz belonged to France until 1801. As a result of the Congress in Vienna in 1814/15 Koblenz felt under the sovereign of Prussia, which ended only after the First World War. Even before, on 8 November 1918, in the course of the November Revolution workers and soldiers took control over military and civil administration. As late as December 1918, American troops of the 3rd US Army marched into the city as part of the occupation of the Rhineland. After 1919, many fortresses were demolished in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Only a few days ago, on 11 November 2018, we commemorated one hundred year's end of the First World War, a war that affected almost all of Europe. As the first modern war it was fought in the Atlantic and Pacific, in Europe, Asia and Africa, 38 states went into it, fighting against each other and waged a ruthless battle led by unprecedented brutality and precision of weapons of mass destruction. It is transmitted ingloriously as the first machine war in world history, as the first major trench warfare, the first chemical warfare with warfare gas and contact poisons, as the first aerial warfare

with zeppelins, balloons and fighters. Over 70 million soldiers have been mobilized. About 15 million felt or died, more than 21 million were wounded, including over 4 million German soldiers; nearly 8 million were taken prisoner of war. The suffering of the civilian population with flight and hunger was terrible.

Humanity stayed – as always in these times of war and terror – completely on the track.

Old orders were destroyed; stable new ones hardly in sight. Further crises and upheavals followed, which should not at least pave the way to the “Third Reich” and the Second World War. But even during the First World War, in 1917, 22 museum directors joined forces in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt and founded the Deutscher Museumsbund. Aware of the social role of museums and as a place where cultural and social barriers should not exist, they created a structure that became the first museum-oriented association, in order to create suitable structures on a common base.

Museums re-formed after the First World War, created new goals and structures and very quickly began to expand their international network. The aim was to operate more strategically and to develop further science-based forms of museum presentation, as well as the contextualization of objects and categorization of disciplines. However, McDonald’s emphasised in 1991 that the focus was on content expertise more than on relation with the audience.

Remembering the two terrible World Wars it seemed quite astonishing that just one year after the end of the Second World War, one of the largest international organizations was founded for museums: it is the year in which ICOM was established in Paris. Today it is, with more than 44,000 members all over the globe, the second-strongest association for museums worldwide and is at the forefront of networking internationally. With its 118 national committees, it is represented in most countries of the world (based on 194 countries worldwide). From the very beginning, ICOM stands for cross-national and cross-cultural thinking and acting in dialogical openness, credibility of scientific work as well as for professionalism, expertise and mediation skills.

Together with ICOM Europe, it was essential for ICOM Germany not only to commemorate this important date of the end of the First World War in this joint conference, but also to reflect on how museum work has diversified in Europe over the past one hundred years, what cultural breaks and new beginnings it has made and how important is the cohesion of museums in Europe today. In view of the numerous trouble spots in East Europe and

Russia, the Middle East and Africa, the large influxes of refugees and migrants, which are moving towards Europe and an European policy, which in many countries would rather establish borders again instead of reducing boundaries, the situation will be exacerbated for the museums. Especially in an international conurbation, which is determined by powerful leaders, who incessantly incite crises of fear, insecurity and mutual denunciation, culture is in danger on a large scale. People, nature, and environment – all this does not matter to them.

Communication and truth are left behind. Intellectual research, critical reporting, cultural issues on a global horizon – all this is increasingly being put to the test, or simply eliminated. Never before so many journalists have been murdered, assaulted, persecuted, and never before cultural institutions have been indexed, such as in Russia, Hungary and Brazil.

Many actors have no answers and no suitable tools at hand to counter these attacks from politics and right-wing or left-wing activists. The scale is unpredictable and yet, even in Europe those open attacks towards intellectuals and museums could negatively affect the communication within museums. Hungary, Poland and Turkey – even Great Britain are at the forefront.

It is up to us as ICOM members to strengthen the European idea of unity again and solidify with suitable programmes, perspectives and influence into society and politics. This will include that in addition to the major European programmes, especially the countless middle sized and smaller museums strengthen their initiatives of networking, of scientific communication and of profound alliances with the society. We should question more, which are the most urgent issues for our museums today, how to define and to secure relevance, how do we share ideas, visions, tools, education, support, etc?

Looking back on our difficult past and the responsibility Germans have in particular, we want to imagine museums as lively spaces of a European and global community. It is on us to learn what history bitterly had tried to teach us. We commemorate one hundred years after the First World War, but we focus on the future to come.

Opening Remarks

Claudia Roth, Vice President of the Bundestag

Ladies and gentlemen, attendees of ICOM Germany!

Dear Mrs. Reifenscheid, dear Mr. Raposo, dear Mrs. Theis-Scholz,
dear Mr. Forbes, dear Mr. Staubermann,

One hundred years have passed since the end of the First World War, that terrible chapter of human history, which destroyed millions of lives, devastated our continent, wreaked havoc in so many regions worldwide; a war that inflicted untold suffering. We will not forget. Many of us, myself included, might have been born decades later, but our responsibility – to remember, to remind others, to raise awareness – remains. It is not less than a miracle that, after all this terror, former enemies became neighbours, and those neighbours have become trusted friends. More than ever, let us make sure that this great gift be preserved.

I am very glad, therefore, that you have gathered in the beautiful city of Koblenz to discuss the role of museums in all this – museums as indispensable democratic institutions that, very clearly, face numerous challenges in an increasingly digitised world; a digitised world that, in turn, offers many new opportunities.

If you ask me, at least, museums are crossroads and meeting points that no smart phone can replace. They are learning environments that help us turn from pure retrospection towards remembrance, into the present and into the future. In a world like ours, in which violent wars and conflicts continue to cause unimaginable suffering, it is bridges we need – bridges that connect us with the past, and that connect us with each other. Museums can be such bridges.

Indeed, museums incite reflection where science may only describe. They emotionalise, touch our innermost feelings, or cast a critical eye. Almost always, they allow us to shift perspective. It is no surprise, against this background, that the Ludwig-Museum, the wonderful host of this wonderful conference, entitled one of their latest art festivals: *Breaking Borders*.

Indeed, let us connect beyond borders and overcome divisions, instead of constructing walls. To do so, let us visit as many museums as we can; the world might look differently if everyone could – and if everyone who can, actually did. Above all, however, let us defend museums against any tendency

of political misappropriation. Museums must be free; even more so in times when freedom of expression, diversity and artistic freedom are increasingly being called into question in many places of the world.

As you can see – and as you most certainly know yourselves – there is much to be discussed. Thank you for doing so in the upcoming days! And believe me: I am already looking forward to my next visit at one of your museums – hopefully soon.

Opening Remarks

Margit Theis-Scholz, Deputy Mayor for Culture, City of Koblenz

Dear Madame and Sir,

Welcome to Koblenz, we appreciate your conference in Koblenz and hope you will have a gainful exchange in participating and interesting impressions of our town in the wonderful surrounding of the Ludwig Museum we are very proud of possessing.

In times of low public budgets, the maintenance expenses for cultural institutions are often discussed. Some politicians are convinced and try to share their opinion that our community may dispense with museums and other cultural domains as theatres, concert halls, libraries and so on as well. So key questions for Museums as modern institutions are:

- » Which part museums overtake in our civil community?
- » Which main tasks have museums in our times?
- » With which challenges are they actually confronted?

This week we held our council about the financial duties in our town. In regard to the tribute for the cultural institutions and associations I proclaimed not only to have an eye on the data of annual visitors, but also on their role as an active part due to a huge number of cultural projects in a community.

Museums collect, conserve, research, present and act as agents. Are they necessary and important in guarantee participation in cultural information and civil heritage? A clear and 100 per cent yes from my side as being responsible for cultural affairs in Koblenz.

Art museums are locations to come together and exchange different meanings about the exhibition and aesthetic and creative products and work. But in a modern society museum are furthermore places for people to visit and enjoy an inspiring atmosphere, being entertained by artists and meet other people to exchange. But more than that it is their part in being a source of reflection about our life conditions and political questions resulting from change in our society.

Museums can be a motor and a pulse for thinking and a kind of mirror of change in our world. They are able to set focus and to make aware. They are

rooms for young and old people to come together and to talk about the things which are presented in an exhibition. Therefore, museums play an important role within the foundation of a common sense of cultural understanding.

Visitors can make journey through different ages, may consider daily things from another point of view as usual. They can be enchanting events basing on the paintings of artists or inform about the actual state of researches. The cultural meaning and the function of a museum is a great value in regard to education history and as a meeting point.

Your issue during this European conference is *Museums, Borders and European Responsibility – 100 Years after the WWI*. Let me describe the situation in Koblenz during that time in short sentences. In 1918 German troops and soldiers came on their way back from the war in France to Koblenz having lost a horrible war and were applauded when they arrived in the town. Obviously the public had not learnt from wrong decisions in the past.

American soldiers stayed in the following time in Koblenz and changed daily life: They played baseball on the streets and bettings after getting wages, made little gifts to the children with chocolate and at that time the unknown chewing gum, and made box championships in cages in front of the castle.

Then the French soldiers as the worst enemy in that time for Germans followed and occupied the region for a long time. It was the breeding ground for the preparation of the next terrible Second World War.

Conflicts and wars are spread all over our globe. What museums can do in prevent is to build international bridges by involved artists and contribute being locations of analysing and inform regarding history development. In Koblenz we arranged and organized this year the Koblenzer weeks for democracy for the first time and we will continue for the next years. Our basic is the aim to sensibilize what we would lose in regard to freedom and liberal thinking in our society if we will turn away from a democratic behaviour and government.

All cultural institutions are members of our team and participate beyond schools, the newspapers, the universities and a huge group of other initiatives. We want to achieve a strong and clear commitment for supporting democratic structures and rules in our town and eject other dangerous drifts – our Ludwig Museum is an important player in this team!