

Editor's preface

Beate Reifenscheid, President ICOM Germany

They appear in the everyday life of museums every now and then, or are a system-imminent theme: Difficult Issues. Outwardly often not or only inadequately communicated, they sometimes represent a tear test for dealing with them. Inevitably they lead to issues, objects, and historical perspectives shifting, or at least undergo a new critical evaluation. Topics from the Nazi past, relics from colonial contexts, dealing with indigenous peoples, as well as collection areas, which today can have a completely different value than in the past, are critical cliffs that need new addressing, exploring, discussing and mediating. In external relationships, this may not be as tension-free as in internal relationships: in the public sector especially politicians are looking to create their own standards and ideas or even dictate them in the worst case. For their part, the public answers with its canon of values, which does not have to be congruent with that of the exhibiting museum.

ICOM Germany, together with the invited five national committees, has chosen this topic as a starting point, broad, varied and, beyond certain borders, to shed light on these complex facets of everyday museum life. For the first time in the history of ICOM, six national committees have come together, creating a pioneering model for not only designing conferences in a dual dialogue. In addition to the content-related challenges that the specially-prepared editorial board had to master, as well as the review and rating of the submitted papers, the organizational board also had to prepare the conference in Helsingborg. We would like to express our sincere thanks to both boards, who have done their job as well as friendly and efficient. We would also like to thank Suay Aksoy, our President of ICOM International, who accompanied Peter Keller, the Director General, during the three days in Helsingborg.

The present conference proceedings bring together numerous contributions of the international ICOM Conference *Difficult Issues*. Under this title, around 200 museum experts gathered from 21 to 23 October 2017 in Helsingborg, Sweden, to present and discuss different practices and concepts on the topic "Which stories are remembered in museums and why?" A first assessment: In order to secure their relevance for the public and thus their acceptance, museums must completely reposition themselves at the center of

society and face the challenges of the present in an increasingly globalizing world. For example, they should make social groups more visible in their heterogeneity, give voice to their sometimes divergent life stories and present them as equal parts of the common cultural heritage (Kathrin Pabst, Kristel Rattus et al.).

For ICOM Germany, as the publisher of these conference proceedings, 'difficult issues' means that museum experts deal with all conceivable problems and do not shy away from them. One focus is on the handling of artefacts and their contexts from the Nazi regime (Suzie Thomas et al.), the culture of remembrance of wars (Karen Logan), also the context of the Holocaust (Natalie Meurisch). Questions about gender issues in museums (Merete Ipsen) or the storage of sensitive collection objects that have been proven to originate from problematic contexts (Ostritsch et al.) are raised. Last but not least, the authors demonstrate the continuity of museums, their further development in the 21st century (Maria Kobielska) and the social discourse with them (Michael Terwey, Lulu Anne Hansen). As museum experts, we can mediate if we can engage in scientific dialogue between what is hidden, concealed or denied, and what needs to be reconsidered, seen and treated (Solveig Hanusardóttir Olsen). The examples presented here from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland and Sweden provide insights into an international, multifaceted museum life. Our goal and desire is to initiate and intensify professional exchange and joint learning across all cultural boundaries with concrete proposals for solutions to problematic aspects of museum work.

The editorial team is pleased now that the majority of the conference papers will be published as Volume 7 of the series *Beiträge zur Museologie* (Contributions to Museology) and at the same time as the first e-publication by ICOM Germany. I would like to thank all those involved who lent their support – in particular the colleagues from the national ICOM committees in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, with whom we jointly organised the conference and who helped us with their publication experience. We also like to thank the authors for their contributions, patience and goodwill in our publication project. Last but not least, the publication platform Arthistoricum.net should be thanked for the advice and support provided during the production process.

We are sure that the contributions made during this conference in Helsingborg will enable our dear colleagues to more easily and bravely face and handle such 'difficult issues'.