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Report from the General Conference ICOM

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A very important event for museums took place in the Czech Republic in the summer of 2022. The 26th ICOM¹ General Conference, which takes place every three years, was held in Prague from 20th to 28th August. Czechoslovakia was one of the founding mem-

bers of ICOM in 1946, but the General Conference never happened here before, till August 2022.

ICOM has a rather complicated structure, consisting of National Committees (124), Regional Alliances (7), Affiliated Organisations (22), Standing Committees (7), Working groups (6), and International Committees (32).² One of the most important parts of the organisation is the International Committees. These committees are the core tools for the work of the organisation and the implementation of its programmes. Each Committee focuses on a specific area of museum work. Committees are places where professionals could share their knowledge, expertises, and best practice and discuss the main topics which museums face. Every year ICOM or parts of the ICOM structure organize plenty of conferences, meetings and events, but the most important is the General Conference. The General Conference deals with global issues for museums over the world and represents the most important center for the International museums cooperation.

1 ICOM – International Council of Museums is an important international organisation with a long tradition. ICOM was established in 1946. The headquarters of the organization is in Paris, France. See more at: <https://icom.museum/en/about-us/history-of-icom/>.

2 See more at: <https://icom.museum/en/network/committees-directory/>.

The General Conference in Prague had to deal with problems which could not be solved in previous years, especially the museum definition. The motto of the Conference was „The Power of Museums“ which represented the role of the museums which should be played as a part of the modern democratic society. The Prague General Conference was very important for ICOM because it was here that the definition of a museum was definitively revised. The process of transforming the definition had already started in 2016 at the General Conference in Milan and the new version was not adopted at the 2019 General Conference in Kyoto. After long discussions, the new definition was adopted in 2022 at the General Conference in Prague. For the reformulation of the definition was formed a special Committee of ICOM, which was focused on finding a conformity across the whole world with the definition.³ The important parts of the definition are different for each part of the world, but finally a match was found.⁴ In the new definition, non-profits, permanent, sustainability, and inclusiveness are emphasized. The new definition should reflect how the world is changing and which topics are important, current and discussed in modern world society.⁵

Organizators prepared for the delegates an extensive and very interesting programme. The programme of the General Conference was divided into individual sessions – the general programme, with keynote speakers⁶, the General Assembly, Election of ICOM presid-

3 ICOM Define – Standing Committee for the Museum Definition. See more at: <https://icom.museum/en/committee/icom-define-standing-committee-for-the-museum-definition/>.

4 Current Museum definition: “A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.” See more at: <https://icom.museum/en/re-sources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>.

5 For example the current topic was on the conference addressed the issue of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine.

6 The keynote speakers at the Conference were: Margarita Reyes Suárez (Colombia, ICANH), Purpose: Museums and Civil Society; Hilda Flavia Nakabuye (Uganda,

ent,⁷ meetings, round tables, discussions, workshops, etc., and then other parts of the Conference off-sites meetings, which took place in 32 members institutions at Prague and its surround, and excursions to places of interest across the Czech Republic (delegates could visited 40 ICOM members institutions). The Prague Conference were organized as a hybrid conference, delegates had an opportunity joined to the conference online. In total the whole conference attended 3566 delegates⁸ from 124 countries over the whole world.

The National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius (NPMC) had significantly participated in the preparation of the conference,⁹ because hosted an important International Committee CECA – International Committee for Education and Cultural Action during the off-sites meeting of the General Conference.¹⁰ Organizator ICOM Czechia issued a publication for the Conference where are also presented collaborating institutions.¹¹

Uganda's Fridays for Future Movement), Sustainability: Museums and Resilience; Lonnie G. Bunch III (USA, Smithsonian) & Hilary Carty (UK, Clore Leadership), Vision: Museums and Leadership; Seb Chan (Australia, ACMI). The keynote speeches reflected the motto of the Conference and were focused on the fields, which were important for the whole Conference like a mission of the museums in the society, environmental responsibility in a global society, leadership and innovations, how to face new challenges, and also how to use modern technologies in the museums.

- 7 Emma Nardi (Italy) was elected as the new ICOM president.
- 8 Amount of the on-site delegates was 2911, online attendance was 634 museums professionals. See more: *Věstník AMG* 5/2022.
- 9 The museum also participated in the Museum night for ICOM delegates, which involved 12 museums from the whole of Prague. Museum staff prepared for visitors guided tours through its exhibition – permanent exhibition – *The Legacy of the J. A. Comenius, Traditions and Challenges of Czech Scholarship to Europe*, and temporary exhibitions *School and War, Defence Education in Czech Schools* and a Lecture *The Legacy of J. A. Comenius and rare old prints from the Collection of NPMC*.
- 10 CECA is one of the oldest and one of the biggest committees of ICOM and has more than 1500 members from around 85 countries. See more at: <https://ceca.mini.icom.museum/about-us/what-is-ceca/>.
- 11 Horáčková Alžběta, Lehmannová Martina, Petlička Filip, ICOM Prague 2022, *Z muzea do muzea/ From Museum to Museum, ICOM Czechia, Prague 2022*.

The National Pedagogical Museum organized off-site meeting and workshops collaborating with ICOM Czechia – Organising Committee Bureau and CECA.¹² The first conference day in the museum on 23rd August was dedicated to 12 speakers from CECA. Their papers were focused on the methodology of museum education, modern approaches using modern technologies, and how museums had dealt with the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic.

During the main day of the off-site meeting on 25th August, lectures were held in NPMC. Markéta Pánková, director of the NPMC, presented a lecture *The National Pedagogical Museum of J. A. Comenius in Prague: History and its Role in the Culture of Pedagogical Memory*, and introduced to the audience the role of the NPMC, the history of the institution, its departments, collections and the mission of the museum in the educational process. Jakub Seiner, NPMC historian, presented *The Legacy of the Founder of Modern Pedagogy J. A. Comenius in the World*, where the audience could learn how the main education ideas of J. A. Comenius are implemented in practical use for example of the project Educational programs of memory institutions for schools. This part of the programme was followed by presentations and the CECA Best Practice Awards Ceremony. The National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius awarded CECA for great unceasing educational activities and dissemination of Comenius' ideas. The President Marie-Clarté O'Neill received the Comenius' Medal on behalf of CECA .

The day continued with a series of workshops in English, French and Spanish, which focused on various topics such as a *Professional Development of Museum Educators, Learning and Engaging Digitally, Museum Education and Decolonization*, etc. All delegates attending the programme in the NPMC got from NPMC and ICOM Czechia many interesting materials and especially the English book *John Amos Comenius at a Glance. Small Encyclopedia of the Czech Genius of the Centuries*, which Markéta Pánková wrote as a part of the National celebrations of J. A. Comenius

12 NPMC has been a part of the CECA since 2017.

in 2020–2022.¹³ However the delegates particularly appreciated the friendly approach, good coordination and the beautiful Renaissance spaces of the Museum.

The whole conference brought the opportunity to meet with museum experts from all over the world, to discuss new modern possibilities of museum education, to share good experiences – and last but not least – to connect experts focusing on museum education as a part of the educational process.

13 Pánková Markéta, *John Amos Comenius at a Glance. Small Encyclopedia of the Czech Genius of the Centuries*, NPMC, Prague 2022.