

The European Year of Cultural Heritage  
“Cherishing our Cultural Heritage”

How to make the most of the public’s passion for their cultural heritage?

**ICOM France – ICOMOS France – NEMO**  
**Dijon, 22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018**

When Catherine Lalumière launched the European Year of Cultural Heritage in Paris on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2017, she reminded the audience of “the ideals, principles and values embedded in Europe’s cultural heritage” and how ensuring its preservation and development in all its diversity concerns every single one of us.

“Cultural heritage comes from our fathers and so we are the heirs.” In every country, the general public are more and more sincerely demonstrating their love for their cultural heritage. Proof can be seen in the increasing number of visitors to museums and monuments (for example, 12 million people attended the European Heritage Days in 2017), in the way they generously support various restoration projects or acquisitions, rally around when something is threatened and give up their time to work on various concrete projects.

Numerous civil society organisations, such as friends of the museum societies, group together well-informed amateur enthusiasts who want to become involved in safeguarding and enhancing their cultural heritage, whether it’s protecting a local church or financing the restoration of a work of art.

Of course, the expression of public enthusiasm is not the same way everywhere. Helping to preserve an iconic site or save an endangered masterpiece in one’s own village is not the same thing as contributing to new acquisitions that will enrich a museum collection. And yet it is the same powerful drive that creates a connection between the general public and their tangible cultural heritage and “culture professionals” can all gain from taking advantage of this enthusiasm.

Every report and public speech henceforth highlights the capacity of cultural institutions to consolidate and even rebuild social cohesion. Organisations are aware that what is at stake when it comes to the democratisation of culture is much more than the number of visitors. We have to simultaneously *please* visitors, whilst meeting the general public’s *desires*. We need to be attractive, which supposes presenting a rich and coherent offering, whilst leaving room for spontaneous individual initiatives. We have to both confront the need for excellence (any action that targets part of our heritage calls upon scientific knowledge and aptitudes, as well as cutting-edge techniques) and manage to *incorporate* the experience of members of the public, which is above all based on emotions. We have to strictly adhere to safety regulations, despite the constraints they involve, and at the same time throw the doors wide open to welcome as many people as possible.

How can we reconcile professional rigor with the sheer energy of the various stakeholders?

For the first time, three organisations which represent a very large number of cultural professions and institutions have come together to identify and ‘acknowledge’ the role played by a public of enthusiasts in the valorisation of our cultural heritage and to lay down guidelines for a constructive relationship with professional actions.

- ICOM France is the French national committee of the International Museum Committee. It counts 4,300 museum professionals and 400 museums amongst its members. ICOM France is

particularly renowned for the quality of its debates on the key issues confronting the museum profession: the professions themselves, organisational changes and questions of deontology in relation with museum collections.

- ICOMOS France is the French section of the International Council on Monuments and Sites. It counts almost 1,200 members and focuses on preserving and enhancing both tangible and intangible architectural and urban heritage and landscapes. Thanks to its ideas and expertise, ICOMOS France furthers the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, both as regards the French government and UNESCO.
- NEMO: The Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)] was founded in 1992. It is an independent network of national museum organisations representing the museum community in the member states of the Council of Europe.

Each of these three professional organisations has its own field of activity, dynamics and membership, but they are united by this notion of “Cherishing our Cultural Heritage”, because of the extent to which it so accurately characterises the emotions to which the places they represent give rise and the public’s fondness for them, to which their selfless actions to cherish them bear witness. This is what convinced us to work together.

This “passion for cultural heritage”, coming as it does at a time when the means at the disposal of public structures are limited and the costs of maintaining them on the increase, is both an opportunity and a risk. It is a real opportunity for those who know how to work with these committed citizens and structure their activities and a risk for those who are tempted to utilise members of the public instead of experts.

And that is exactly what our specialist workshops aim to address. It is less a matter of continuing the highly topical debate on visitor services than a desire to envisage the place of the “participative” or “collaborative” public and, in particular, the ethical and legal aspects that the activity of non-professionals in the field of cultural heritage may engender. To give just one example, many members of the public want to gain access to museum storerooms and don’t understand that public collections are sometimes both invisible and inaccessible. We need to make people aware of these questions, provide historical and technical training and ensure the transmission of a deontological code if we want to encourage the enthusiasm of these members of the public in a positive way.

Some members of the public have (sometimes very precise) knowledge of the cultural heritage of their surroundings and may possess very real and sometimes rare expertise. How can we coordinate their actions and make the most of them?

During these workshops in May, we will address these different questions in a concrete and cross-disciplinary manner:

- Can we validate this expertise?
- What basic skills are required before any concrete action in the field of cultural heritage can be envisaged?
- Do museum professionals have the necessary training to supervise the participation of members of the public? Should this situation modify their way of working and to what extent?
- How can we bring the resources of the public to bear on private initiatives and how can we characterise their participation: Is it a form of sub-contracting?
- How can we exercise our scientific and legal responsibilities?
- What are the deontological limits of this exercise?

The debates will be organised as follows:

A first ICOM France / NEMO half-day will present several examples of good practice that apply to professionals working together with members of the public in Europe.

A second ICOM France / ICOMOS France half-day will tackle the question of the similarities and differences between museum and monument practices based on the professions involved: architects, restorers and guides.

A half-day will be given over to visiting emblematic sites.

The ICOM – ICOMOS – NEMO workshops will be open to the general public.