

*Discussion about*  
**Museum ethics**  
IN FINLAND

**ICOM**  
Finland



# Introduction

FINNISH NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF ICOM

The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums was approved in 2004. For a long time now, the Finnish National Committee of ICOM has been discussing museum ethics and the need to make more active use of them in the museum field. The Finnish Committee has also thought about possibly updating the code to better correspond to the requirements of museum work today.

To initiate discussion, the Finnish National Committee of ICOM and student association Corpus from the University of Jyväskylä organised the Museum Ethics 2.0 seminar in spring 2015 and used it as the basis for editing an online publication: Museum Ethics 2.0. Discussion and ideas. (Finnish Museums Association Publications 70.) To activate the discussion in museum field, the local committee published a series of blog posts in spring 2016 in which museum professionals separately consider each rule in the Code of Ethics for Museums, looking at its meanings and topicality.

To increase the significance of museum ethics and develop the Code of Ethics for Museums, the Finnish National Committee of ICOM also wants to participate in international discussion. Some of the articles in the Museoetiikka 2.0 publication are in English, and other articles include summaries in English. With this English translation of blog posts, the Finnish Committee offers all museum professionals the opportunity to learn about the current discussion about museum ethics in Finland.

# How are your museum ethics?

LEENA PAASKOSKI

When was the last time you opened the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, International Council of Museums 2013) for support in a challenging situation in your work? Did it help you? Did it expand your thinking about the mission of the museum, the methods used and the opportunities available? What are museum ethics in your work and your museum?

My ethics booklet had been buried under piles of books in my office until, by chance, I had to delve into the matter. And I realised that conscious thinking about museum ethics is healthy, useful and interesting – after all, museum ethics are meant to guide, strengthen and inspire museum work. At the museum where I work, we have (unknowingly) exercised museum ethics when thinking about, for example, who should finance museum operations, whose stories we are telling in an exhibition, or whether the interest of citizens with initiative in supplementing museum collections can be called passive collecting, as we have done in the Finnish museum field.

According to ethics consultant Janne Behm, D.Th., who spoke at the Museum Ethics 2.0 seminar organised by the Finnish National Committee of ICOM and student association Corpus from the University of Jyväskylä, the rules for professional ethics are the community's obligations which ensure that the community is preserved and develops and acts correctly. Ethics can support the idea of a shared mission and increase mutual trust within the professional community. The seminar pondered whether the rules for professional ethics for museums used in Finland still provide sufficient support for today's museum work or if we should start revamping and updating them. Indeed, ICOM encourages museum professionals in its member countries to keep developing the ethical rules.

Ethical discussions can never be completed. The Finnish National Committee of ICOM encourages everyone to take part in the fruitful, multi-level and lively exchange of thoughts. In these blog posts, we aim to initiate discussion about the ethics in museum work and their importance, following the perspectives of the eight rules in the current Code of Ethics for Museums. Another tool for initiating and spurring on discussion is the Museoetiikka 2.0 (Museum Ethics 2.0) publication, published by ICOM and Corpus in co-operation with the Finnish Museums Association and the University of Jyväskylä.

By encouraging discussion about museum ethics, we want to collect daily museum experiences and examples of the utilisation of museum ethics as well as opinions, impressions, ideas and suggestions on how the Code of Ethics for Museums could possibly be updated. Or are an ethical spirit and understanding more important than individual detailed rules? What if the Code of Ethics for Museums 2.0 was a lively forum for ethical discussions in which everyday experiences and examples would keep accumulating and our ethical thinking at our cultural heritage would develop further? How could we best exercise museum ethics?

But how about if we start with this: when and in what situation did you last open the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums and did it help you?

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COLLECTIONS MANAGER, LUSTO - THE FINNISH FOREST MUSEUM

*Rule 1:  
Museums preserve,  
interpret and  
promote the natural  
and cultural  
inheritance of  
humanity*



# There are plenty of obligations, but what about resources?

EERO EHANTI

I will delve into the first rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. This is how it goes: “Museums preserve, interpret and promote the natural and cultural inheritance of humanity.” The principle under the heading states that museums are responsible for the tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage and requires that governing bodies and persons in charge protect and promote this heritage as well as the human, physical and financial resources made available for that purpose.

When you read further down, you get an idea of a non-commercial institution that relies on a sturdy foundation and acts consistently, persistently and professionally within the framework specified by society. The institutional position must be intact, and the same applies to the facilities in which the museum operates and cherishes and displays its collection. Ensuring sufficient funding is important, which the Code duly emphasises while also advising caution. Regardless of funding source, museums should maintain control of the content and integrity of their programmes, exhibitions and activities. The personnel must be professionals, of course.

*Somebody  
chooses what will  
be cherished as  
cultural heritage  
for future  
generations*

Such high principles, don't you think? On the other hand, all this is also essential, which shows in the fact that most of the same principles have been recorded in the Finnish Museums Act as prerequisites for state subsidies.

I This first rule is probably not the one referenced most often when discussing the daily questions in museum ethics, but it is an important one to contemplate. As it is, the points listed in this rule should constitute the foundation on which successful museum work is built. Is this the case?

To begin with, my mind is filled with questions about obligations that the principle quoted at the beginning loads on to the backs of museums. In my opinion, these obligations are quite extensive. Are museums categorically responsible for all cultural heritage? Or should the responsibility be limited a little? After all, not all cultural heritage gets the attention of museums, even if it deserved it. Firstly, it is a question of choices. Somebody chooses what will be cherished as cultural heritage for future generations and, hopefully, for the benefit and joy of our generation as well. Secondly, we are faced with the reality of life. There are not enough resources to take care of everything. Therefore, I do not think that museums – or cultural memory organisations, if we expand the perspective a bit – can be said to be responsible for all cultural heritage; only that part of cultural heritage that we choose to cherish and that is possible to cherish. Someone must enable the museum processes. Someone must pay to keep the facilities intact, ensure that there are a sufficient number of skilled personnel and so forth.

The rule says that governing bodies and persons in charge should enable these things. Naturally, this is true. When we look high enough, the persons in charge can be found in Finnish politics and ministries, which make many of the decisions affecting our museum field. But a lot of the responsibility lies with the management of the organisations. In order to ensure sufficient resources for your operations, you must act yourself.

This takes us to another aspect of the first rule to which I want to draw your attention – the mention about the non-commercial nature of museums. The prerequisites of museums for enabling their operations may be undermined by fear of commercialism. I do not think commercialism is that bad; as a matter of fact, I think it is essential these days. Museums are competing for attention with other pastimes.

This competition for attention requires commercial thinking and expertise. I recently listened and marvelled at an American museum director's account of their fund-raising efforts, which had resulted in huge sums of money, unbelievable from the Finnish perspective, from both sponsors and private donors. Although our rules and regulations by no means prohibit sponsorship, they exude an anti-commercial attitude that I do not consider very up-to-date. Could we somehow modify this attitude to make it easier for museums to operate in modern society, an environment often revolving around finances?

Of course, this may be considered nit-picking and people may think that the rule is sufficient in its current form, but I think it pays off at least to think about the obligations to ensure that no museum or museum worker is crushed under an impossible workload due to an excessive sense of duty. Or that the necessary resources are not attained for fear of commercialism.

To conclude slightly provocatively: should museums only feel a sense of duty for something for which someone is paying them? That someone could be the state or municipality but also some private party. Reaching the latter requires a bravely commercial touch, doesn't it?

EERO EHANTI  
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INTENDANT, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FINLAND



*Rule 2:  
Museums that  
maintain collections  
hold them in trust for  
the benefit of society  
and its development*

# On the influence of museum collections and the energy in objects

NINA ROBBINS, PÄIVI UKKONEN, MINNA TURTIAINEN

According to the second rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, “museums that maintain collections hold them in trust for the benefit of society and its development”. The societal positioning of museums inspires discussion, like Eero Ehanti aptly pointed out in the previous blog post. Museums constantly need to justify activities that do not yield any short-term benefits. Do museum collections and collections management sound out of date in today’s electronic world with its quick updates? Does collections management have an influence, and do collections promote the benefit of society?

When looking at museum operations in the long term, museum collections are the core of the operations that will stand the test of time. We have the understanding that museums are public institutions where all demographic groups have the opportunity to gather and exchange ideas in a calm and safe environment.



*Museum  
collections are  
historical proof  
of the influence  
of museums*

One of the points of reference in these havens is the museum collection, its original, three-dimensional objects and, most of all, the energy conveyed by them. By the energy in objects, it can be understood that each original museum object has characteristics exceeding its information value, consisting of its originality, external form and history of existence and eventually adding up to more than the sum of its parts. This is the underlying reason behind the influence of museums.

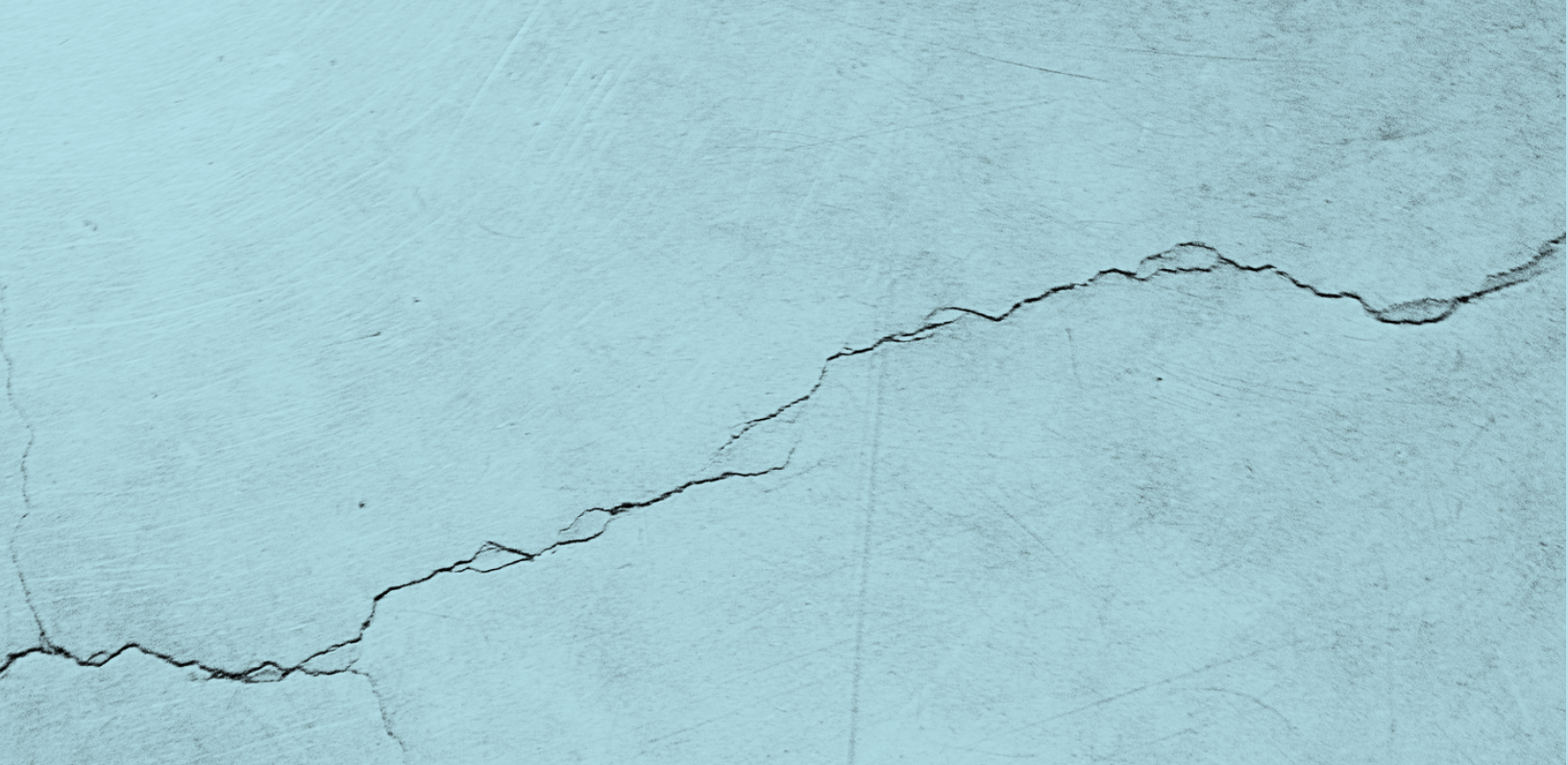
In a Great Museum, as defined by museologist Kenneth Hudson, it has been considered important to preserve a part of society by means of the expertise of museums. The objects in the collections have been preserved for hundreds of years thanks to the museum's collections management, and the museum value of the objects has been relayed from generation to generation in an unbroken chain. Museum collections are historical proof of the influence of museums. The objects in the collections and their heritological value are part of the capital that only museums and other cultural memory organisations possess. This potential should not be wasted in an era where the influence of one's own activities matters.

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*Rule 3:  
Museums hold  
primary evidence for  
establishing and  
furthering knowledge*



# Does your museum conduct research?

MINNA SARANTOLA-WEISS

The third rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums reminds us that “museums hold primary evidence for establishing and furthering knowledge”. It is our duty to ensure that the collections are researched and looked after. Also, the collections and the information contained in them should be accessible to everyone.

The Code takes a stand on the acquisition, analysis and respectful handling of materials. It ponders the personnel’s rights to the results of the research and urges people to share their expertise and respect the expertise of others. The Code also encourages co-operation with other institutions collecting cultural heritage.

Like many other things, research is closely linked with the collection management policy of museums. The ICOM Code of Ethics demands that the value of collections as research material is clearly identified in the collection management policy of museums. The collection management policy must also make clear that it is based on the museum’s stated mission. The document should not depend on trends that are popular in the museum world at each time.

How is this realised in your museum?

*Can collections  
and collection  
research be used  
to challenge  
predominant  
truths and power  
relationships?*

In the 2010s, an increasingly central role is played by visions and goals specified by museums in co-operation with other communities. However, many museum researchers are still individualists whose interests are guided by their own ideas more than the employer's strategies. How far away from the museum's stated mission can the research topics actually diverge? Where is the line between an employee's rights and obligations? How long can a researcher sit on material for some eventual, possible research use?

Whose truths and stories do the museum collections intend to highlight and corroborate? Can collections and collection research be used to challenge predominant truths and power relationships? Do we dare? What about changing truths? Scientific information is accumulating and self-correcting by nature. Can we identify today's essential information and share it with others? Does funding influence the selection of research subjects? On what principles do we publish material in Finna, the shared search service of Finnish cultural memory organisations?

Research conducted at a museum should be linked with the overall collections and collection management policy of the museum, if we want to spend our resources sensibly and, therefore, maybe also ethically. Do we always check the background of new material acquired carefully enough? How will the information we collect be conveyed to the next generation of museum professionals? Are we collecting information for ourselves or serving the accumulation of overall cultural heritage? Ethical acquisition results in high-quality collections whose acquisition principles will also be understandable to those who will continue our work. I think that this is linked with modern documentation in particular but, naturally, all other acquisition as well.

The ICOM Code of Ethics does not mention research policy among the documents necessary for a museum. I do not know if every museum needs one – each can consider it individually. However, it is probably clear that all museums must think about what research means for them, since very few museums have resources for research based on purely scientific questions. Nevertheless, a Finnish museum professional's education includes an understanding of the various stages of the academic research process. It would be useful to specify to both oneself and others the parts of the process in which the research work of one's own museum is positioned. Producing information and opening it for an audience, also an academic audience, is an important part of both the research process and museum work. Co-operation with academic institutions also increases mutual understanding of the cultural heritage, and museums need not perform all the work themselves. For an example, you can look at Espoo City Museum's recently published research and publication policy (in Finnish).

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*Rule 4:  
Museums provide  
opportunities for the  
appreciation,  
understanding and  
management of the  
natural and cultural  
heritage*





# What is a good and functional museum relationship?

REETTA KARHUNKORVA, LEENA PAASKOSKI

According to the fourth rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, “museums provide opportunities for the appreciation, understanding and management of the natural and cultural heritage. -- Museums have an important duty to develop their educational role and attract wider audiences from the community, locality, or group they serve. Interaction with the constituent community and promotion of their heritage is an integral part of the educational role of the museum.” So, we have the ethical obligation to establish and maintain relations with our communities. What is an ethically sound museum relationship like? Both parties should surely ask themselves what they expect of the relationship, what they get and what they give. If the relationship does not work, who needs the museum? We are facing some rather fundamental questions when we ponder our relationships with our communities.

The background of Lusto – The Finnish Forest Museum lies in the Finnish Forest Museum Foundation, which was founded in 1988 and given the task of establishing a national forest museum in Finland. The foundation consisted of more than 40 stakeholders in forestry who wanted to preserve cultural heritage relating to forests. Forestry organisations were closely involved in planning the museum, gathering the collections, building the museum, starting the operations and even organising the funding.

Many things have changed in 20 years in both forestry and the museum field as well as in the relationships between the forest museum and forestry organisations. We have asked our interest groups what they would like to get from us. Some of the relationships have perhaps gone a bit flat. Some stakeholders did not know what to wish for at all, since they no longer knew how the relationship started in the first place. This means that museum counselling is needed and, at the moment, we are actively looking for new perspectives into old relationships. Communities are important to us, since we would have no significance without them. In order to appreciate, understand and protect the natural and cultural heritage, we need to have enough people who

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appreciate, understand and protect it. Luckily, many relationships have also been deepened and strengthened in the course of the years. We have even made some completely new relationships and found a new spark in old relationships.

Even though the Code of Ethics talks about interaction and service, talking about the “educational role” of museums feels slightly one-sided and dictated. Learning – as well as the responsibilities, obligations and rights relating to culture heritage – should be mutual. Could the key features of a good museum relationship be modelled after the instructions for a good romantic relationship? These include trust and a steady foundation, shared values, open and direct interaction, mutual responsibility for the relationship, respecting the needs of both parties, acceptance and appreciation, freedom and personal development, true friendship. The parties must also ask themselves whether they are desirable partners. And it does not make sense to stay together if you do not have what is most important: a common goal and purpose.

A good, ethical museum relationship is based on museums being able to open up the significance of appreciating, understanding and protecting cultural heritage to communities for which the cultural heritage may be an important resource that they need when they build their identities, images and brands. The cultural heritage is a societally significant resource whose use and utilisation are enabled by a good museum relationship.

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*Rule 5:  
Museums hold  
resources that  
provide opportunities  
for other public  
services and benefits*

SATU ITKONEN

The fifth rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums looks at co-operation opportunities between museums and other public actors. Or did I misunderstand the heading completely? The subheadings in this section only talk about identification services, meaning the identification of illegally or illicitly acquired objects, and authentication and valuation. Indeed, the special expertise of museums is necessary for these.

The Code warns that the stated mission of museums may be compromised if their special expertise, skills and material resources are used to extend the museum's activities by sharing resources or providing services.

But could the allocation of resources also be rethought? Could the fifth rule also deal with the sort of co-operation with other providers of public services that aims at richer interaction and is linked with meanings: What do museums have to offer that promotes good interaction between people and makes them strongly feel that they are alive?

*What do  
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In practice, this could involve sharing and developing expertise with actors in the social and health sector: using museums in a new way for special groups and new visitors, making museums more like living rooms, expanding the communal aspects, getting customers more involved and hearing their voices. This is time-consuming and even expensive but rewarding (as we know).

I have been working in the museum field for a long time, also as a freelance specialist in the art and museum fields, and have had the opportunity to be involved in many great – but short-lived! – co-operation projects between museums, the social and health sector and associations. Why on earth have these projects not led to more extensive, long-term or permanent forms of co-operation?

In Finland, we have the Culture for All service, Health from Culture network as well as numerous other bilateral partnerships, projects and publications. There is plenty of proof that we can achieve more together and will learn a lot. Nevertheless, the structures have not changed much, the co-operation has not become permanent and there is still no proper coordination. Many projects are a feather in the cap, nice things to write reports about.

Without a bold new approach and persistence (as well as successful funding and co-operation concepts), there would be no successful concepts like National Museums Liverpool's House of Memories project, which aims to improve the lives of people living with dementia. In the project, the national group of museums has produced a multi-faceted, research-oriented method that has reached thousands of people through training and has been widely spread and awarded at the national and international level – a method it is developing and productising successfully. Do read more about it!

Why do our museums lack the courage to expand beyond their “stated mission”? Not everyone needs to do everything, but selecting your partners and target groups courageously might sometimes result in something good and lasting.

*Rule 6:  
Museums work in  
close collaboration  
with the communities  
from which their  
collections originate*



# Do not always believe the community

KALLE KALLIO

An old man was moved to tears while visiting the Finnish Lenin Museum. Established in 1946 in Tampere, Finland, the museum was still displaying its legendary permanent exhibition, which highlighted the Bolshevik leader's feats of strength. The man started talking reverently to the guide about Father Stalin. What are you supposed to answer in such a situation? Could you just try to wriggle out of the awkward conversation, should you challenge the old man with the help of historical research, or should you pretend to agree with him, because the customer is always right, as they say?

The sixth rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums does not sound very nice from the guide's perspective. According to the Code, museum collections reflect the cultural heritage of their community, they may include strong affinities with political identity, and the original owner of the collections must not be exploited. The collections of the Lenin Museum were donated by Finland's eastern neighbour, and the museum was founded by local communists soon after World War II. Does this heritage oblige the museum to retain respect for the creator of the collections, the mighty Soviet Union and, at the same time, the remains of the community that established the museum?

Surprisingly many rules in the ICOM Code of Ethics seem to have been created for the needs of a postcolonial museum world. They have reined in the old museums of the colonial powers and lightened the white man's burden: lurking in the background is a shame about innocent aboriginal peoples that have been exploited, robbed and racialised by the imperialist museum system. While this is a genuine concern, it is a poor match to the ethical problems of Finnish museums, for example. We Finns should rather think about how the overly sensitive, prim touch of today's museums often leaves the sore points of the past untouched. In its present form, the Code mainly warns us against hurting anyone and encourages us to respect communities according to their wishes or conditions.

In addition to underlining dignity, the Code luckily states that museums should also promote human well-being, social development, tolerance, and respect by advocating multisocial, multicultural and multilingual expression. As a matter of fact, these higher values, which are based on the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should be emphasised instead of the naive talk about communities. If a museum is using its collections to cover up past wrongdoings, it is acting unethically – not even the creator of the collections should be allowed to evade the judgement of history. Museums must also dare to look at their own roots.

In order to gain ethical confidence for its reformation, the Lenin Museum in Tampere sought help from a higher power – the public. A small exhibition was put up for this purpose, where the visitors could take a stand, make suggestions and vote on the kinds of things that the new museum should address. The wish list was topped by Soviet humour and daily life, the KGB, labour camps and dissidents. The former permanent exhibition did not say a thing about these. Naturally, the old collections cannot provide all this, but they can be supplemented, and new meanings can be assigned to the key works.

When preliminary information about the new content of the Lenin museum started spreading, it seems that the museum unfortunately lost a few of its old friends. Those still attracted to Soviet communism (for they do exist) are afraid of seeing a sacrilege and might have similar feelings as the aboriginal peoples unethically objectified by ethnographic museums. On the ethical scales, however, the memory of the Soviet system's victims weighs more today than admirers of the system. For surely museums cannot just stay tactfully silent if innocent people have been killed, whether in Stalin's meat grinder or a cannibal tribe's cooking pot?

KALLE KALLIO  
MUSEUM DIRECTOR,  
FINNISH LABOUR MUSEUM WERSTAS

Werstas opened the revamped Lenin Museum in Tampere on 17 June 2016

*The ICOM Code of Ethics seem to have been created for the needs of a postcolonial museum world*



*Rule 7:  
Museums operate in  
a legal manner*

KIMMO LEVÄ

It feels slightly odd that museums should separately mention in their Code of Ethics that they operate in a legal manner. This should go without saying or writing. However, the news published in 2016 about companies benefiting from the Panama tax haven show very bluntly that the law can be read in many ways. In Finland, the party that has so far seemed the worst perpetrator in this is Nordea Bank. Their entire management has had to convince people that the bank follows the law – albeit not as solemnly as museums do through the seventh rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. According to the Code, “museums must conform fully to international, regional, national and local legislation and treaty obligations”.

Presumably, from the perspective of legal experts, Nordea has not broken the law. Whether it has acted justly is another question. Apparently, the thinking of many legally trained people might be described in the words of Finnish author Väinö Linna – in Linna’s novel *Under the North Star*, crofter Otto Kivivuori described the legal studies of his son Janne, saying that he was not studying the law in order to be able to follow it but to circumvent it.

Not everyone thinks that using one’s perfect legal knowledge to find loopholes is just. However, complete justice is even more unlikely than complete legality. This is because justice is more about individual feeling than knowledge. Tax evasion is a good example of this. Few people consider it just that wealthy people are evading taxes with the help of Panama. Presumably, equally few people consider it unjust that Finns travel in hordes to Estonia to buy liquor, even though this is also a question of tax evasion.

*The laws broken  
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undoubtedly  
copyright and  
personal data  
laws*

Following the law from the viewpoint of general justice seems to be highly important in issues represented by organisations and their employees. It is clear that, from the viewpoint of justice, museums and their employees are treated differently than other people in questions relating to the preservation and representation of cultural heritage. This can be tested with a little mental exercise: if a public work of art was vandalised or destroyed by an art museum employee or a regular hooligan, how would it be reported in the news? In the first case, the background of the vandal would probably be mentioned in the headlines, and it would also be likely to be the key factor that made the event newsworthy.

I claim that no museum conforms to ICOM's ethical rule about operating in a legal manner. A museum's operations are governed by a number of laws relating to administration, finances and actual museum work, and nobody knows the full content of these laws and, therefore, can fully comply with them. At the national and international level, the laws broken most often are undoubtedly copyright and personal data laws, whose content is ambiguous. Following these laws fully would destroy the foundation of all collection work. However, this does not mean that we should stop following the laws or, in a tight spot, plead ignorance or complain about their complexity. We must know the laws applying to our activities better and be able to use them to assess the legality of our activities and the risks involved in our interpretations of them.

Where legality is concerned, one peculiarity of Finnish museum operations is the fact that most museums do not follow – and do not need to follow – the Finnish Museums Act. Unlike the name suggests, this act does not specify anything about museums or the legality of their operations.

It stipulates how a museum can start receiving state subsidies and keep receiving them. Of all Finnish museums, less than 20% are currently receiving state subsidies. There is a need to expand the content of the Museums Act. As regards the development of the field, it would be good if the Museums Act could also include other laws linked with museum operations, the first of which that spring to mind are the Antiquities Act and the Act on the Protection of Buildings. The role of these as the cornerstones of the legal and societal operation of museums could be strengthened.

In my opinion, the rule “Museums operate in a legal manner” is a problematic one among those in the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, particularly as regards its current content. Following the law cannot be an ethical choice as such; it should be self-evident. By contrast, choosing not to follow the law may be an ethical choice in certain situations. Such ethical choices can be made by environmental movements, for example. If the entire rule is not omitted to make room for some value-based rule, the content should be modified to say something about how museums must promote justice, particularly from the perspective of their key task and the related questions. If this feels like too big a step, let’s at least omit the word ‘fully’ from the current definition. Let’s not make things too difficult by striving for perfection, even in this matter.

KIMMO LEVÄ  
SECRETARY GENERAL, FINNISH MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION

*Rule 8:  
Museums operate in  
a professional  
manner*

# Do they?

JANNE VILKUNA

Museums do not operate or do anything at all! No operations or activities are ever performed by an organisation but by people, together or alone. Certainly, museum professionals do their job and get their pay from the museum or its owner, such as the municipality, city, state or foundation, but the most essential question is who they are ultimately working for – and how? Indeed, the principle of the eighth rule of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums does not talk about museums but members of the museum profession, and goes on to list 16 prohibitions in its 18 subsections. Looking at these, I am reminded of the ten strict commandments given to Moses by God in the Old Testament, seven of which are based on the explicit prohibition “Thou shalt not”. The fifth commandment, however, includes a promise: “Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” In my understanding, what you were originally meant to honour in order to prosper were not your parents or other authorities but something that was vital back then: the knowledge and skills of your parents and community – culture. The eighth rule of the Code, by contrast, does not include a single promise. Why not?

In the eighth rule, professional conduct is seen as a list of the employee’s obligations and responsibilities towards the employer – the museum – but not vice versa. They must not do this, they must follow this and avoid that, etc. Many of the prohibitions and recommendations are self-evident to Finnish employees. This prohibitory approach to the profession reminds me of an old Finnish proverb about climbing a tree. If you want to do it in the most difficult way possible, do it with your bottom first. There is also another problem in the prohibitions. When Hannu-Tapani Klami, a late Finnish Professor of Law, commented on the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, he noted that many of their prohibitions do not match Finnish legislation. The last sentence of the principle of the eighth rule goes like this: “Every opportunity should be used to inform and educate the public about the aims, purposes, and aspirations of the profession to develop a better public understanding of the contributions of museums to society.” There is something wrong here, upside down. Is the public there for the museum? Is the goal of museum work to make the museum appear good to the public? Or are the goals elsewhere altogether? If they are, like I assume, could these goals be emphasised to both members of the museum profession and society instead of listing prohibitions?

*Professional  
conduct is seen  
as a list of the  
employee's  
obligations and  
responsibilities  
towards the  
employer – the  
museum – but  
not vice versa*

What are professional skills in the context of museums and who has them? To simplify, I think these skills are possessed by all people who work at a museum and have familiarised themselves with the museum as a societal actor in general and with the field of their own museum in particular. These two factors are also mentioned in the Finnish Museums Decree as prerequisites for state subsidies. Professional skills in museums have hugely expanded in the past few years, and people have – speaking allegorically, in university terminology – received their education in completely different faculties and subjects. The only common denominator may be, as mentioned in the Museums Decree, museology (heritology), which familiarises one with the museum and cultural heritage processes. One question that is relevant today: In a professionally or non-professionally managed museum, can volunteers working without pay act as museum professionals? I think they can, provided that they, too, have familiarised themselves with the museum as a societal actor in general and with the field of their own museum in particular.

The current ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums was approved in 2004. It is an updated version of the Code adopted in 1986. All in all, the Code seems to be out of date in many aspects in today's quickly changing world. Therefore, it should be revamped urgently. For an international organisation whose rules should apply to all countries and cultures, the challenge is tough and the road is long. Should we look elsewhere for a solution?

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