

**FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
WORKING GROUP ON THE USE OF LANGUAGES
(mandate of the Executive Council 6 July 2001)**

*"Every language is a living museum,
a monument to the culture that has used it"*
(D. Nettle and S. Romaine, *Vanishing Voices:
The Extinction of the World's Languages*,
Oxford University Press, 2000)

*Some languages may die or disappear,
but no possibilities exist, or have existed,
for a general unification of all the languages of humanity.* (Benedict
Anderson *Imagined Communities*, 1983)

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A - Foreword

The use of languages within a multicultural and multilingual organisation such as ICOM raises a number of problems since it affects the financial, organisational and cultural aspects of the association

With regard to the cultural aspect in particular, the two main objectives of ICOM – the protection of cultural heritage, even intangible, and technical and cultural collaboration between members – together with the need for a regular flow of information, requires an in-depth reflection on the use of languages.

The diversity of languages is one of the cultural assets of humanity; every language should be protected, preserved and, if possible, encouraged in everyday life. At the same time, access to information is an alienable right of all individuals.

ICOM therefore finds itself in a clear contraposition between two seemingly irreconcilable demands: the need for different nations and groups of mother tongues to communicate, by using a common language, and the moral obligation to protect languages as part of the cultural heritage of humanity. In addition, ICOM must ensure that linguistic barriers do not prevent participation in the activities of the organisation.

With regard to the use of languages, ICOM has a great responsibility because its decisions can determine the official language of museum professionals and promote its widespread use.

B – Aim and organisation of the Working Group

The objective of the Working Group on the Use of Languages was to draw up proposals on the use of languages within ICOM, which would ensure a capacity to communicate effectively while protecting languages and preserving the accessibility of ICOM. At the same time, it also had to take into consideration the impact its decisions might have on the economy of ICOM, the human resources at its disposal, the operational capacities of the National and International Committees, and its financial resources.

During the first phase of the work, it will be necessary to collect information on the use of languages in all sectors of ICOM. Further knowledge will therefore have to be acquired on:

- The use of languages by National Committees and respect for linguistic minorities.
- The use of local languages for activities organised by the Secretariat.
- The use of official languages and local languages at international meetings.
- The languages used in ICOM's publications (official and local languages)
- The production of dictionaries by International Committees and eventual needs.

The Working Group is composed of the following 10 members:

Pascal Makambila (EC Member Congo)

Giovanni Pinna (EC Member Italy)

Slim Khosrof (Tunisia)

Hildegard Viereggs (ICOFOM – Germany)

Lim Siam Kim (Singapore)

Ersi Philippopoulou (ICAMT - Greece)
 Françoise Dumont (Belgium)
 Alda Costa (Mozambique).
 Luis Repetto Malaga (ICOM-LAC, Peru)
 An Laishen (China)
 Gurgen Grigorian (Russia)

In view of the fact that certain aspects connected with the use of languages involves National and International Committees, it is vital for the Working Group to work in close liaison with the other Working Groups that cover these sectors of ICOM.

C- The current situation

The linguistic situation at ICOM at present is as follows:

C1 – Official languages of ICOM

According to article 4 of the Statute: *1. English and French shall be the official languages of ICOM, each of which has equal status and may be used by a member at any international meeting of ICOM. 2. The General Assembly may adopt further official languages provided the costs of doing so are met by the membership.*

The 20th General Assembly (Barcelona 2001) adopted Spanish (Castilian) as the third official language of ICOM.

The Statutes make no distinction between official languages and working languages.

According to statistics updated in 1996, the first thirteen languages in the world, in terms of numbers of users in relation to the world population, are the following (according to Nettle and Romaine 2000):

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 15% Chinese, Mandarin | 8. 2,1% Japanese |
| 2. 5,4% English | 9. 1,6% German |
| 3. 4,5% Spanish | 10. 1,3% Chinese, Wu |
| 4. 3,2% Bengali | 11. 1,2% Javanese |
| 5. 3% Hindi | 12. 1,2% Korean |
| 6. 2,8% Portuguese | 13. 1,1% French |
| 7. 2,8% Russian | |

According to the classification by mother tongue in the Atlas of Language, the 18 most spoken languages are, in the following order:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. English | 10. Punjabi |
| 2. Spanish | 11. Javanese |
| 3. Hindi | 12. Binari |
| 4. Arabic | 13. Italian |
| 5. Bengali | 14. Korean |
| 6. Russian | 15. Telugu |
| 7. Portuguese | 16. Tamil |
| 8. German | 17. Marathi |
| 9. French | 18. Vietnamese |

Of the three official languages adopted by ICOM, English is in second place and Spanish in third place, while French occupies the 13th position in the first classification and in 11th position in the second classification. The decision to choose English, French and Spanish as the official languages was therefore based not on how widely they were spoken but according to different criteria. English is by far the dominant language in the areas of politics, economics, science and culture, especially since the Second World War (English is the official language of more than 60% of the 185 nations recognised by the United Nations). French enjoyed a reputation as the language of culture and diplomacy until the beginning of the 20th century (I remember that the official publications of the International Museum Office of the League of Nations were written in French). And finally, the adoption of Spanish is a recognition not only of the fact that it is a widely spoken language but also of the close attention paid by Spanish-speaking populations to the development of museums, the museum profession and the protection of cultural heritage.

Everything seems to point to the fact that English, French and Spanish were chosen as official languages because they were associated with the cultural centres that were, still are, and will continue to be, predominant as far as the main interests of ICOM are concerned. As for their relationship with ICOM (and, therefore, their importance within the association), they can be defined as “*metropolitan languages*”, as opposed to “*peripheral languages*”, such as, for example, Russian, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese or Greek. This places emphasis on the fact that the peripheral or central role of a language is not due to the language itself, or even to the number of people speaking it, but to differences in the economies, and the cultural economies, of the users.

C2 Survey on the use of languages by National and International Committees

During the first months of 2003, a questionnaire (see annex) was sent to all National and International Committees for the purpose of finding out how languages are used within the association. Since only a relatively low percentage replied, it was impossible to draw up reliable statistics. In fact, out of 28 International Committees, only five responded (NATHIST, CIMCIM, ICOMGALSS, INTERCOM, ICOMAM), and only 15 replies were received from the 108 National Committees (Estonia, Finland, Denmark, China, Germany, Iran, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Hungary, Uruguay and Venezuela).

The only interesting, but partial, observation that can be made is that the National Committees attach little or no importance to their linguistic minorities.

C3 Distribution, in percentages, of the three official languages among ICOM members

At present, the choice of languages made by ICOM members is as follows:

12,343 have chosen to receive mail and information in English
 4,800 in French
 1,549 in Spanish (Castilian)

This difference may be due to a wider use of the English language but also to the smaller proportion of ICOM members in Spanish-speaking countries, especially by people who are unable to understand or express themselves in English.

C4 – Languages used by the Secretariat

(Excerpt from the Report by the Secretary General 15 March 2001 on the adoption of Spanish as the third official language)

1. *Of ICOM's Secretariat staff of thirteen all are bilingual in French and English and two people speak Spanish in addition to French and English. Other languages spoken at the Secretariat: German, Italian and other languages depending on where people originally came from.*

2. *Working documents for the Executive Council are in English and French. It sometimes happens that documents are in English only.*

3. *Simultaneous translation during the Executive Council meetings is available in English and French. The last three meetings were exceptional because Spanish was made available by ICOM 2001. The working sessions of the Executive Council have no simultaneous translation and are mostly in English.*

4. *The working documents for the Advisory Committee are in English and French.*

5. *Simultaneous translation during the Advisory Committee meetings is available in English and French, including the separate meetings of the National and International Committees.*

6. *The financial documents are all in English and French.*

7. *Official documents for members (Membership Brochure, Handbook of Administrative Procedures, For More Information and yearly membership Circulars) are all in English and French*

8. *Official messages from ICOM's leading bodies to its members, partners or others are in English and French.*

9. *ICOM's basic documents, the "Code of Ethics" and "Statutes", are in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Various National Committees translated the "Code of Ethics" in various languages..*

10. *Daily contact with members by mail, telephone, fax or e-mail is approximately for 80% in English, 16 % in French, 3% in Spanish and 1 % in other languages.*

The breakdown of the active membership's language preference at 9 February 2001 is:

English: 10 060, French: 4,112, Spanish: 1,323 (As a supplementary remark,: we have about 3,300 German speaking members)

Publications

12. *ICOM News is in English, French and Spanish*

The Study Series is 50% in French and 50% in English (approximately); in the next ICTOP Study Series there will be some content in Spanish as well.

13. *Special publications are mostly in English and French, however other languages may be used for a special purpose, like Italian, Hungarian and Czech for the "One Hundred Missing Objects, looting in Europe" or Arabic in the "Handbook of Standards, Documenting African Collections". Spanish has been used for (I) "One Hundred Missing Objects, Looting in Latin America", (II) for the book that resulted from the workshops/conference on Cultural Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Peru and Bolivia in 2000 and (III) for "Illicit Traffic in Latin America" as a result of a workshop in Cuenca.*

Website

15. *ICOM's Web site is in English and French, but for the "Code of Ethics", it is also available in Spanish.*

The documents disseminated via ICOM-L are in French and English.

PR

16. *Press releases and press files are in English and French.*

In the case of regional events other languages may be used as well.

17. *The daily work in the Communication Sector is done in French and English. Spanish is used, notably because ICOM News is also produced in Spanish.*

Special Projects

18. *Language use in the Special Projects is about 50% English, 35% French, 8% Spanish, 2% Arabic and 5% in other languages.*

D – Current problems

D1 – Guaranteeing communication

One of the principle objectives of the organisation is to ensure smooth communications between members of ICOM, whatever their culture or country of origin, since it is obvious that opportunities for communicating leads to the cultural exchanges that are vital if ICOM's goals are to be achieved.

The most reliable guarantee is obtained by using an official language that is spoken by the greatest possible number of members within the association. However, the choice of an official language leads to certain significant inconveniences.

1. It gives an advantage to individuals whose mother tongue has been chosen as the official language, or to bilingual persons who use the official language as a second language. Individuals who are obliged to use a language that has been learnt experience more intellectual fatigue, longer working hours, and greater difficulty in expressing themselves than they would in their own language, and they risk being misunderstood or not being able to follow discussions. When discussing the ability to read easily and rapidly, De Saussure stressed that for those who have perfect mastery of a language, writing moves from phonetics to ideographs, implying that words are read as ideographic signs and not as a succession of phonetic signs. Reading is therefore faster for those who have a perfect knowledge of a language than for those with only a phonetic knowledge.

2. Since all languages are the expression of a culture, people who are obliged to express themselves in a language other than their own experience a shift from their culture to another one. The adoption of a common official language therefore tends to erase cultural differences. Such are the premises of a linguistic theory known as relativism, so dear to Humboldt and Heidegger, among others, who believe that the mind cannot be separated from the language (see paragraph 3 below on "The lingua franca and linguistic relativism").

3. It creates a barrier towards those who are able to understand and express themselves in the common language adopted, a barrier that also affects participation in the association as a whole. An example can be provided by ICOM itself. One of the selection criteria for taking part in the workshop on the "Use of new technologies for museums " (Willemstad, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles 22-25 August 2001), organised by the Secretariat, was fluency in English, which obviously excluded members speaking Spanish, French, Dutch, etc.

4. It imposes bilingualism as a fundamental condition for participating in ICOM. Encouraging linguistic plurality is, admittedly, a way of guaranteeing more communications between members of ICOM, without countering local identities. However, it is difficult to see what resources are at the disposal of ICOM in this area.

5. It restricts the dissemination of ICOM's activities externally, among populations with only an average level of multilingualism, who are unable to speak the common language chosen by the association.

The adoption of several languages reduces the problems we have described only in terms of the percentage of people involved, but it does not eliminate the linguistic barrier and the standardisation of culture. Moreover, adopting more official languages inevitably entails additional costs for the management of the Secretariat, organisation of meetings and production of documents.

D2 – Protecting linguistic differences

Languages play an important role in the identity of a community. "*One is what one speaks*", according to the English linguists Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine. And the Maori chief, Sir James Henare, who died in 1989, used to assert, "*Language is the vital force of the Maori culture and of our mana. If the language dies, as some people claim, what will be left for us? I therefore ask our people: who are we?*" And a Welsh proverb has a similar meaning: "*Heb iaih, heb genedl*", that is to say, "no nation without a language". Preserving languages means preserving cultural differences and saving the cultural autonomy of minorities. The negation of using a local language and imposing a language that is different from the local one are some of the means used to destroy the identities of communities. The French ethnologist Jean-Loup Amselle wrote that "*among the rights of minorities there is also that of giving up their culture so that majority groups do not have the possibility of choosing in their place the type of culture or language they consider to be the most suitable*".

The importance of languages as a component of world cultural heritage has been noted in many places and in many circumstances. UNESCO recently relaunched the importance of protecting linguistic differences in the Declaration on Cultural Diversity, submitted for discussion at the 31st session of the General Conference (October 2003). Article 5 of this Declaration states, "*Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights as defined in article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Articles 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. All persons should therefore be able to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother language*".

In the same document, UNESCO proposes to pursue the objectives laid down by the right to cultural diversity:

- "*safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages (point 5)*
- "*encouraging linguistic diversity at all levels of education (point 6)*"

ICOM has also been involved in protecting linguistic differences. The fifth point mentioned in the Programme Committee, included in the report presented by the 20th General Assembly, states: "*One of the modes of expression of a culture is its language. However, the disappearance and transformation of many languages is in the process of being accelerated. Everyone should recognise and attack the fundamental threat (constituted by the disappearance of the diversity of languages) to global heritage and culture*". The need to work towards protecting linguistic diversity is therefore a duty that ICOM cannot avoid.

D3 – The lingua franca and linguistic relativism

It is felt in many scientific and cultural circles that the adoption of a common language is very positive because it guarantees a universal means of communication, breaks down linguistic

barriers and ensures identical access to knowledge for everyone, as well as the same capacity and power to express themselves.

However, it is sometimes forgotten that the adoption of a lingua franca is a highly selective operation because it excludes large sections of society from the possibility of communicating and expressing themselves, especially the economically and politically weaker classes, as well as entire communities of the underprivileged. What used to occur in the past with Latin and French, is now happening today with English. Many authors have insisted on the fact that a lingua franca is adopted by making use of the language spoken in countries and in communities (when it is a question of non-national territories) having a more developed economy and, hence, greater economic and political clout. The spread of a lingua franca in a country speaking another language is asserted by the gradual adoption of this language by the leading classes, just as much to develop economic activities as to adapt to a model of society considered to be “superior” (Hagège 2000; Nettle and Romaine 2000).

Given that the establishment of a lingua franca derives from the economic and political power of the country in which it is the mother language, and since its use gives the country in question a considerable advantage, one enters into a vicious circle, the final result of which is the decline and disappearance of subordinate languages and, above all, the subservience of the cultures to which these languages belong to the culture of the language that has become dominant. For example, with the spread of English as a lingua franca, not only are numerous local languages vanishing because they are no longer used, but there is a tendency to standardise culture along the lines of the culture (and the economy, of course) of the country where the language is dominant. It is, in actual fact, a struggle for existence, with the result being the “natural selection” of languages.¹

If the question of a lingua franca is viewed under this angle, it appears to be obvious that the choice to adopt a lingua franca (or a new language) is the voluntary act of a community, for example, the scientific community, a certain type of literary community, a religious community or a political community. Once this is admitted, the following question arises. Will adopting a new language also lead to adopting the culture that goes with it? Since language is the most direct means of communication between individuals, I believe the reply to this question is in the affirmative. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the preservation of languages has always been a key component in the preservation of national identities (Jordanova 1996) and that linguistic minorities, especially in the past, were at the centre of claims for autonomy². This means that language is not a neutral means of communication but a channel for cultural transmission, so that when a community adopts the language of another community, it also adopts its culture, its customs and, in the final analysis, its way of thinking (and therefore its art and literature as well).

The fact that language is not neutral but “a form that forms, a model that modifies what one speaks” is confirmed, for instance, by Leibnitz who also declared that “even if we reflect the world,

¹ The success of English as a lingua franca obviously has economic and political reasons despite certain views to the contrary. It has been claimed, for instance, that the spread of English as a universal language is due to the fact that it is a democratic language which has never been associated with totalitarian regimes (Brandt in Hauge, 1996), that it has a simpler structure than other languages, or that it is more tolerant. These theories, however, seem to be of secondary importance.

² As it appears in the very interesting book by Benedict Anderson entitled *Imagined Communities*, languages were used during the 19th century as a foundation to build European nationalist movements.

we do it from a certain point of view, which could be linguistic.” In a similar spirit, Wilhelm von Humboldt referred to the inseparable union between language and the intellect, and therefore thinking. When an individual speaks German, Danish, French or Italian, he believed, his thoughts are modelled and constructed by his language. Thus, speaking Italian implies thinking in Italian.

What is known as linguistic relativism, the slogan of which could be based on the expression of Benjamin Lee Whorf “grammar is a vision of the world”, is opposed to the universalist interpretation of language (with roots in structuralism that looks upon language solely as a system of conventional signs), according to which language has a dual nature: it contains a profound structure that cannot be modified, and a variable area, to the extent that linguistic differences become a superficial phenomenon.

Relativism and universalism are the respective functional interpretations of those who perceive language as a factor of identity (Anderson 1983) and those – especially scientists—who believe that the existence of a universal scientific language is indispensable and who, as Hauge pointed out, are of the view that one cannot speak of English or French science as one speaks of English or French literature.³

The conviction of a real connection between language and thought, and the negation of the idea that the difference between languages is only structural is based on the possibility of distinguishing between different literatures.⁴

Voices from scientific circles have nevertheless been raised in favour of linguistic relativism and the inevitable connection between language and culture. The biologist Michael T. Ghiselin, for instance, has highlighted the importance of communication problems connected with the widespread use of a lingua franca in the field of science, and the deformed or partial transmission of information. “Today”, he writes, “we are cursed by English serving as a lingua franca with the result that much of the nineteenth century literature is unintelligible to younger scientists”.⁵

³ Hans Hauge wrote on this subject: “We react to the phrase French chemistry but not to the phrase French literature or language. Why? Because we don’t believe that there is a particular French way of doing chemistry...”.

⁴ To demonstrate linguistic relativism, one can make reference to Greek and Irano-Aramaean inscriptions, like Josef Wiesehofer (2003, page 81). These are inscriptions that have been found in the western part of the kingdom of Maurya (present-day Afghanistan), describing the sending of ambassadors by King Maurya Aoka (3rd century A.D.) to Egypt, Cyrene, Epirus, Macedonia and Syria to spread the message of the dharma (the straight path). From the linguistic point of view, it is interesting to note that the Greek inscriptions are very different from those in Irano-Aramaean; they are distinct from the Indian mode and are linked under the linguistic and content aspects to the knowledge and customs of the public they are addressed to, and therefore respect the linguistic sensibility and expressive forms of the Greek citizens who lived in the kingdom of Maurya. Their messages, at least partially, has a Platonic and Aristotelian patina. On the other hand, the inscriptions in the Aramaean-Iranian language are addressed to the inhabitants of eastern Iran and western India in inflexions familiar to them.

⁵ Ignorance of languages goes hand in hand with ignorance of the world. If on the one hand, individuals whose mother tongue is chosen as a lingua franca find themselves in a advantageous position because they are not obliged to learn other languages in order to be understood universally, on the other hand, the absence of this obligation risks limiting knowledge of their own culture. This paradoxical risk leads to assertions similar to the one put forward by Thomas Babington Macaulay,

(Ghiselin 2001). In the field of science, Ghiselin continues to note, the adoption of a lingua franca produces various effects. In order to be read, scientists whose mother tongue is not very widespread, such as Italian or Russian, are obliged to use another language to express themselves, adopting the models and, therefore, the culture of the countries of the language in which they express themselves. In addition, the general public who, unlike scholars, are not capable of understanding the language used, rely on translators for their own scientific knowledge. However, only works of divulgation are translated, usually written by authors who are not necessarily engaged in active scientific research but are often journalists or professional scientific divulggers, and the result is that what is actually disseminated are exercises in simplification or adaptations of the original scientific thinking.

If, as we have said, the choice of a language can be a deliberate act of a community, and if language and culture are inseparable, then the deliberate choice of a lingua franca becomes one that has philosophical aspects. This is the case of the international scientific community. By choosing English as the general language for exchanges (by giving it a dictatorship that can only be compared to that of Latin in the distant past), it has made a choice based on an important foundation: the interpretation of science as a universal and coherent ensemble, one that is monocultural in that it is deprived of relations with the reality of different cultures.

D4 – Linguistic relativism and museology

All these considerations lead to a reflection on Museology. Can museology be interpreted in the same way as science? Is museology also universal, coherent, monocultural and detached from different cultures?

Museology still does not have a real definition: it is neither a discipline nor a science nor a system. At present it is considered as a series of actions, techniques, tools and constructions related to a multitude of subjects and fields – individuals, communities, power groups, identity, memory and the economy. It does not have a universal definition, and this appears to be obvious in view of the fact that the term “museology” is interpreted and used in different ways in different languages (André Devallée, Personal Communication).⁶ The same can be said about the main area of application of museology, the Museum, which has been given widely differing definitions and, therefore, interpretations, especially when considering non-bureaucratic definitions, those that seek to define its nature rather than its actions.⁷

Chairman of the Committee on Public Education of Bengal in 1834, “one single shelf of a good European library is equivalent to the entire literature of India and Arabia” (in Anderson 1983).

⁶ I wish to thank Andrée Devallée for allowing me to consult his Thesaurus which has not yet been published.

⁷ There are two kinds of definitions for the museum: definitions related to the functions of museums that are the outcome, in particular, of legislation and associations (ICOM, AAM, etc) and definitions related to the nature of museums that have been proposed by many authors (Cameron, de Varine, Sullivan) or by intellectual movements (for example, The New Museology). On this subject, I would like to refer to what Stephen Weil has written: “That museums should be commonly defined in functional rather than purposive terms is not surprising. The very utility of a definition is to clarify what is different and distinctive about the subject it defines. What is different and instinctive about museums, of course, is that they collect and display objects. That they do so for a larger and publicly beneficial purpose - a purpose that they may to a degree share with a community’s schools, hospitals, churches, symphony orchestras and day-care facilities - is neither

Consequently, it is difficult to claim that there is a universal, coherent and monocultural museology that is independent of the cultures in which it is practised. And as it has already been noted, since culture and language form a compact pair, I feel that adopting a lingua franca in this domain is, at best, a third-rate solution.

Protecting linguistic differences means not only preserving languages as elements of intangible heritage but also safeguarding cultural identities, each one in turn being in a position to develop a special museology: preserving linguistic diversity therefore implies guaranteeing a diversity of approach to the world of museums.

E - Recommendations

The Working Group feels that in order to ensure smooth communications within ICOM and at the same time protect and preserve linguistic diversity, it is necessary to move in the following directions:

E1- No separation between official languages and working languages

There is usually a clear distinction between official languages and working languages in international organisations. The European Community has 11 official languages (the languages of 12 member States) and three working languages (English, French and German)⁸, while the United Nations has six official languages and two working languages.

The difference between official and working languages lies mainly in the fact that in the case of the former, it is compulsory to use them for official documents and meetings (plenary sessions, commission meetings, etc), while the latter are used for preparatory documents and internal reports.

As already mentioned, the ICOM Statutes do not make provisions for working languages over and above the official languages, and according to the report of the Secretary General, the identification between working and official languages is evident.

Given that the working languages are also the official languages, it would appear that a new official language – as is the case for Spanish – leads to an increase in management costs and an additional workload for the Secretariat, as the Secretary General underlined in his report. For example, in the case of simultaneous interpreting, the increase from two to three languages would raise the language combinations from two to six.

It is nevertheless our view that with respect to Spanish (Castilian), a separation should not be made within ICOM between official languages and working languages, by keeping English and French as working languages and relegating Spanish to the simple status of a non-operational official language. The following considerations run counter to this solution:

- Spanish (Castilian) was officially and unanimously adopted as the third language of ICOM by the 20th General Assembly in Barcelona.
- Spanish (Castilian) is the third most spoken language in the world, as indicated in the statistics quoted above, while French, the second official language of ICOM, occupies the

different nor distinctive. Ergo, museums that basically do have a larger and publicly beneficial purpose is not a characteristic that often appears in their definition. (...).”

⁸ Before its increase to 25 members

10th or 13th position in the statistics. As already mentioned, French has been one of the official languages of ICOM since its foundation for cultural and historic reasons. In this respect, I should like to point out that it is the official language of the International Museum Office and of the review *Museion*. French is therefore one of the official languages by right, even if it does not represent a very high percentage of users

- As a living association, ICOM cannot refer only to historic traditions but must adapt its own organisation to the changes brought about by time and cultural movements.
- The relatively small number of members who have requested to receive their mail in Spanish (1,549) is a sign of the modest impact of ICOM in Spanish-speaking countries.
- A greater and more regular use of Spanish could, therefore, serve as a driving force for a greater presence of the organisation in these countries.

In consequence, the Working Group on the Use of Languages is of the opinion that Spanish (Castilian) should be one of the languages of ICOM, on the same level as English and French, and that no difference should be made between official languages and working languages.

E2- General recommendations for the management of ICOM

The adoption of three official languages guarantees smooth communications within ICOM among most members but not among all members because some of them are unable to understand or express themselves easily in one of the official languages. It is necessary for ICOM to guarantee access to the contents, values and activities of the association even to these members. For reasons connected with language, ICOM cannot permit itself to exclude even a fraction of museum professionals from the international debate on museums, museology and heritage, or to deprive itself of the intellectual and professional contributions they can make.

Smooth communications, easy access and protection of linguistic diversity can be encouraged by inviting National and International Committees, as well as all sectors of ICOM, to focus their efforts on these three objectives.

The following are the recommendations of the Working Group on the Use of Languages:

1. All official documents (minutes of the Advisory Committee and Executive Council, documents of the Working Groups, balance sheets, etc), official publications (Statutes, Ethics Code, Triennial Reports of Activities, Welcome Brochures for Members, etc), and the house organs of ICOM (ICOM News) should be written in the three official languages: English, French and Spanish (Castilian).
2. The ICOM web site should be in the three languages.
3. The ICOM Discussion List and Studies Series should be open to contributions in the three languages.
4. The official meetings of ICOM (General Assembly, plenary sessions of the General Conference, and meetings of the Advisory Board and Executive Council) should make arrangements for simultaneous interpreting in the three languages.
5. In the case of the General Assembly and plenary sessions of the General Conference, it would be desirable to use the language(s) of the host country in addition to the official languages.
6. To reduce the management costs of the General Secretariat, the latter could adopt one of the three languages as the working language, restricting it to its internal documents. However, a document that is intended for circulation among all ICOM members should be written in the three languages.

The use of unofficial languages (for example, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Italian, etc) should be possible for official proceedings and publications referring to a specific linguistic sector of ICOM, which does not concern the association as a whole.

E3- Recommendations for the National Committees

A major role to increase the accessibility of ICOM, remove linguistic barriers and, at the same time, protect local languages, should be played by National Committees who would be responsible for disseminating the contents of ICOM at national level and in the local languages. In this regard, National Committees should be requested to use local languages for their activities and to take into consideration the linguistic differences existing in the country they represent (for instance, Castilian, Catalan and Basque in the case of Spain), in order not to create splits within the national community.

They should undertake to translate into the local languages and disseminate the basic texts of ICOM (Statutes, Ethics Code, Presentation of ICOM, resolutions, documents on programmes, etc), publications such as the History of ICOM, documents of general interest or linked to the goals of ICOM (for example, the 1979 UNESCO Convention and the Unidroit Convention of 1998 on Illicit Traffic), documents or publications of International Committees considered to be of particular scientific importance or of general interest, such as the Thesaurus that André Desvallée is in the process of drawing up, ICOM publications that are vital for countries, such as the Manual on the Prevention of Natural Disasters or the volumes in the series *“One Hundred Missing Objects”*. With respect to the latter, I personally feel that it would be more effective to distribute them to the populations that are the victims of looting rather than the police, and that they should be translated into the local languages. Resources for such activities therefore need to be found in the places concerned, by drawing up agreements with the governments. As far as possible, National Committees should make efforts to ensure simultaneous interpreting during the conferences they organise, as well as to translate the relevant reports.

It is important to recommend the use of local languages to National Committees so that they do not lose the glossaries pertaining to museums in these languages, and to discourage the habit of coining mutant words originating from the lingua franca (especially English). As already stated, this would guarantee the cultural identity of local museologies.

National Committees should be able to go beyond the role of merely managing membership through these activities, and become genuine *“agencies for promotion, information and liaison”*, capable of linking the local communities of professionals to the organisation as a whole and contributing to the protection of local tangible and intangible heritage.

E4- Recommendations for the International Committees

Since International Committees bring together experts from all over the world, they are obliged to use a common language but not necessarily the three official languages. It is preferable for them to use at least one of the three official languages for their working documents, official meetings and scientific publications. However, it is also desirable for scientific meetings to use the local language in addition to a working language, in order to ensure maximum accessibility (even for non-members of ICOM) and to permit access to peripheral languages. However, it will always be necessary to have simultaneous interpreting from and into one of the three official languages of ICOM. If a local language is used, it will be necessary to arrange for simultaneous interpreting

from and into the working language. Financing for this purpose should not be borne by ICOM but should be the responsibility of the place in question or of the International Committee.

Scientific publications produced by International Committees, such as the Study Series, need not be translated into the three official languages. Even though a common language would be opportune, the simultaneous use of two working languages in the same publication should not be excluded. The use of another language is possible for publications aimed at a specific linguistic reality.

International Committees can play an important role to facilitate communication as well as to protect local languages by compiling (in collaboration with the interested National Committee) multilingual technical dictionnaires, such as the Vocabulary of Museum Security Terms published by the ICMS Committee, or glossaries.

E5 -Recommendations for the General Secretariat

In the previous pages, we recommended that all official documents of the Secretariat intended for external distribution should be written in the three languages of ICOM whereas internal documents (2A/6) could be written in one language only.

Furthermore, to facilitate communication between members, it would be useful if the Secretariat were to take the following recommendations into account:

- To ensure that local languages are used, at the same time as official languages, during the events it organises.
- For meetings organised by the General Secretariat, the use of a single official language will be possible in accordance with the linguistic capabilities of the participants.
- To arrange for the minutes of these meetings to be translated into the local language and widely distributed in the region through collaboration with the local National Committees. This is a practice that has already been established. At the Workshop on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Southern Asia (Hanoi, Vietnam 9-13 April 2001), Vietnamese was used as a working language together with English, and the Ministry of Culture and Information of Vietnam was requested to translate the documents into Vietnamese.

E6- Recommendations for the Executive Council

The Executive Council can play an active role by encouraging access for all members to the values and contents of ICOM. On the one hand, it will have to make sure that local languages are given their rightful place at events organised by National Committees, International Committees and the Secretariat, and on the other, it could invite International Committees to compile specialised multilingual dictionnaires, as this would obviously be a particularly valuable communication tool.

It should also secure that the three official languages are used on an equal basis in the documents for the official meeting (General Conference and General Assembly) and that simultaneous translation in the three languages is ensured during these meetings.

E7- Recomendations for the Working Groups

The documents produced by the Working Groups should be translated and circulated in the three official languages of ICOM. During the working sessions, the choice of language(s) should be based on the linguistic composition of the group.

E8 - Recomendations for editing practices

To ensure that members have easy access to, and immediate understanding of, the documents produced by the different sectors of the association (General Secretariat, Working Groups, etc), they must be written as simply as possible, on a few pages, in a language that avoids unusual terms, complicated phrases and useless repetitions. It is recommended to avoid documents consisting of hundreds of pages, with subsequent high translation costs and arduous reading required of members who do not belong to the linguistic groups of the three official languages.

E9 - Recomendations for using Internet and the ICOM Discussion List

The Working Group on the Use of Languages is convinced that there is an inverse relationship between rapid circulation of information (the use of Internet and e-mail) and linguistic accessibility, and it is of the view that the following two problems should be considered:

- Lack of access to Internet of certain members in developing countries.
- Imperfect knowledge of the language used for electronic discussions, which is nearly always in English. In this regard, it is important not to forget those whose mother tongue is not one of the three official languages and who do not necessarily have a good knowledge of one of them. Although many are capable of understanding English, French or Spanish, not all of them can write well in one of these languages. It is difficult for them to participate in discussions through Internet because although they are able to understand, they may have difficulty in replying.

As for the use of electronic mail, the Working Group on the Use of Languages recommends:

- Taking measures to avoid sending by e-mail exclusively documents that concern all members.
- Ensuring that electronic messages and discussions through Internet respect required standards of concision and simplicity.
- Making sure that the ICOM Discussion List avoids, as much as possible, the habit of replying to messages by adding its contribution to the previous messages.

Giovanni Pinna
Member of the Executive Council

Paris, 9 February 2004

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Annex

Questionnaire on the Use of Languages by ICOM International and National Committees

With the aim of producing a Charter for the use of Languages, the Working Group on the Use of Languages is carrying out a survey into the use of languages by ICOM National and International Committees.

Every Committee Chairman is therefore kindly requested to fill (in English, French or Spanish) the following questionnaire and, if possible, to return it not later than the 28th of May to Giovanni Pinna, e-mail address email giovanni@pinna.cx, fax 0039 02 43919840.

Part reserved for NATIONAL COMMITTEES

Name of the National Committee

Which is the national official language?

Is there more than one official language? Yes No

If yes, please specify which one.....

Are there linguistic minorities in your country? Yes No

If yes, which are they?

.....

Which language is normally adopted during the Committee's activities at a national level (meetings, conferences, and assemblies)?

.....

Which language is normally adopted for bulletins, reports and circular letters?

.....

Which language is normally adopted for scientific publications?

.....

Excluding the national language, are other languages used? Yes No

If yes, please specify which languages

.....

Are the ICOM official languages adopted? Yes No

If yes, please specify which ones

On which occasions, in what way, and how frequently are the unofficial languages of linguistic minorities employed?

.....

.....

Part reserved for INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEES

Name of the International Committee.....

Does the Committee adopt all of the three ICOM official languages? Yes No

Which language is normally adopted during the Committee's activities (meetings, conferences, assemblies)?.....

Which language is normally adopted for bulletins, reports and circular letters?
.....

Which language is normally adopted for scientific publications?
.....

During meetings and conferences is the language of the country where these activities take place adopted as well as the language normally adopted by the Committee? Yes No

If a local language is adopted during meetings and conferences organized by the Committee, is it translated into one of the official languages of ICOM?
.....

Has the International Committee ever directly or indirectly produced technical dictionaries?
Yes No

If yes, please specify which ones
.....

Signature.....Date.....