

ICOM ROMANIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE: TAKING STEPS FOR INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

Dr. Virgil Ștefan NIȚULESCU

The ICOM Romanian National Committee was established only in 1958. The reason, for this delay, compared with the date when ICOM has appeared, lies, exclusively, in the political landscape of the time. Being on the other side of the Iron Curtain, Romania started to reconnect with the Free World only after it was accepted in the UN, together with other communist countries, in 1955. The years of development and openness (1964 – 1971) meant a lot for the museums' development in Romania. Unfortunately, year after year, situation got worse and, starting with 1981, Romania became more and more isolated, internationally. The country ceased to pay the fees to ICOM and, in spite of the efforts made by some important chairs of the National Committee (like Mihai Băcescu, ICOM honorary member, and Iulian Antonescu) it was suspended from the Council, until 1990.

Immediately after the crush of the communist regime, Romania's curators and museologists began to work in order to normalise the situation. The National Committee was re-established, already, in 1990, by the efforts of Corina Eugenia Sandu and Radu Florescu – who was elected chair, followed, starting with 1996, by Alexandru Marinescu. In March 2004, a new board was elected: Virgil Ștefan Nițulescu (chair), Lia Maria Dulgheru (vicechair), Doina Păuleanu (secretary), Dan Octavian Paul (treasurer) and Ligia Fulga (member).

The number of ICOM members steadily increased, in Romania, but – due to financial reasons – most of them are individuals. However, most of the museums (members or not of ICOM) are aware of the importance the Council has and about many of its contributions to museum profession. In addition, the

recent Law on museums and public collections (issued in 2003) is using the current definitions of the concepts (as that for *museum*, for instance) in the profession, as they were stated by ICOM.

The International Museum Day was enthusiastically adopted by the Romanian museums, even if they were or were not ICOM members, already, in 1978. Especially, in the last nine years, the Romanian National Committee, with "open gates" events, symposia, openings and performances, celebrated the Day.

The 2004 International Museum Day was, for sure, the most intense museum celebration, in Romania's last decade. The ICOM Romanian National Committee delivered a special message devoted to the event, to the press. The President of Romania, H. E. Mr. Ion Iliescu, has awarded tens of medals to some of the most important curators in Romania. The National Commission for Museums and Collections has held a festive meeting. Three of the most visited museums, in Bucharest (National Museum of Natural History "Grigore Antipa", Romanian Peasant Museum and National Geologic Museum), all of them being located in the same area, near the Government headquarters, have organised, for the very first time, in their existence, a joint event, together with the Bucharest University and an NGO, bringing closer to the Capital inhabitants one of the most beautiful regions of Romania: Hateg. The region is world-wide famous for the "dwarf" dinosaurs discovered in the area, but is, also, very well known, in Central Europe, for the very well preserved vernacular architecture, as well as for the intangible heritage, miraculously vivid. The "Astra" National Museum Complex, in Sibiu, has organised several openings

and performances, but, most of all, a whole series of events that emphasised the crafts, as they were transmitted, from the older generations of artisans, to the youngest. A similar programme was the one held by the "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum, in Bucharest, for two consecutive days. The Criş Country Museum, from Oradea, had no less than a five days programme, celebrating the local intangible heritage. The Institute of Eco-Museum Research, in Tulcea, has started, in that very day, two special projects, concerning the emphasising of the intangible heritage. The "Mihai Eminescu" National Study Centre, in Ipoteşti, devoted to the work of the Romanian *national poet* had, also, scheduled conferences and openings where the public was informed about the richness of the intangible cultural heritage. The "Moldova" Museum National Complex have organised a joint event, with the Japanese Embassy, in Romania, presenting the Asian nation's intangible heritage. The Prahova Historical and Archaeological Museum had no less than eight different events, held in three localities, on the theme of the Day. The Visual Arts Museum, in Galaţi, have organised a symposium concerning the painting technics, as they are taught to the young artists. At least another dozen of museums held different other events, bringing thousands of visitors in their locations. The fact was amazing for an ordinary day of Tuesday, when people are, usually, very rare visiting museums. Last, but not the least, the ICOM Romanian National Committee has announced the winner of the annual competition for the ICOM

Romanian National Committee. This year, the award was offered to curators from the National Art Museum of Romania and from the Institute of Eco-Museum Research, with a special commendation for a group of curators from the National Brukenthal Museum. All the events were impressively well covered by the audiovisual and print media, national and local.

The importance of the International Museum Day, in 2004, was noticeable for all the museums, as it was, probably, the most important national event created around museums – be they national, regional or local, of history, arts or natural sciences etc. – and for the benefit of an extremely diverse public, who learned about a kind of heritage that was rarely associated with museums, before, and enjoyed a wonderful day, listening music, looking to artisans, watching performances a.s.o.

For the ICOM members, in Romania, such a day was an opportunity, also, to discuss professional issues with their colleagues and to convince some of them, to join the Council.

However, all these activities had a major goal that could not be achieved in only a few days: that of raising the awareness of the entire society about the richness of the intangible cultural heritage and about the dangers that this very particular heritage is facing in the global civilisation. That is why, the Committee is trying to use future opportunities, in order to continue this work and to help the protection of the intangible heritage, by legal measures, as well as by research and communication to the general public.