

ICOM Voices – Pilot Episode

English Transcript

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Mathieu: Welcome to the pilot episode of the new ICOM Voices podcast – a one-of-a-kind project that gives you a behind-the-scenes view of how museum practitioners and thinkers from all over the world get their inspiration, develop their strategies, and the challenges they face.

Whether you're a seasoned museum professional, a museology student, or a curious culture buff, tune in to the ICOM Voices podcast where we discuss the latest trends, practices, and, most importantly, get to know the people behind museum projects.

I'm your host, Mathieu Viau Courville, and today I'm speaking with the creators of ICOM Voices and the making of the podcast: what led the ICOM team to create this podcast, why now, and what you can expect for this new series throughout 2022.

Now if you're new to ICOM, the International Council of Museums is the global organisation of museums and museum practitioners with nearly 50,000 members across 140 countries who are all committed to the conservation of the world's natural and cultural heritage. ICOM is the voice of museum professionals internationally and raises public cultural awareness through global networks and co-operational programmes.

In 2020, ICOM created ICOM Voices, a new editorial space where museum professionals can publish short articles about their ideas and field experiences – and this podcast is both part of that project but also part of some of the new trends we're seeing in this digital and hyperconnected era we're living in.

One of the big changes in the last few years has been a growing popularity of those online platforms that allow you to publish your ideas quickly and share your projects with larger and more diverse audiences.

It seems today that museum professionals, but also designers, freelance curators, writers, critics and so on.. many choose to write and publish their articles on sites like medium.com, hyperallergic.com, even as academia or LinkedIn posts, then you can of course blog, vlog, tweet, retweet, Facebook, Instagram, etc.

It seems then that we like publishing options that combine informal communication and social networking with high visibility for our projects and scholarly outputs.

Articles are getting shorter and aimed at sharing ideas, innovations, and field experiences but they are also engaging, and use more and more concise language and are to the point.

And podcasts seem to be part of that trend: they offer new ways to understand and think about ideas but most importantly to get to know the people behind these ideas.

With me today are the creators of the ICOM Voices podcast: Aedín Mac Devitt who is the head of the publications and documentation department at ICOM; Virginie Lassarre, editorial

coordinator; Laetitia Conort, digital communications coordinator; and finally, Alexandra Fernandez, who is the head of ICOM communications and public relations.

Now Aedín, maybe we could start with you? If you could tell us a bit more about the making of ICOM Voices, and how the project started?

Aedín: Sure, if I can take you back to 1948, that's when ICOM started publishing its magazine, called ICOM News. So ICOM News was quite institutional with lots of information about what was going on in the ICOM network but there was also some scholarly content and articles that appeared in ICOM News over the years, they're still cited today in some academic journals. So at the time, it was really a way for members to stay in touch with what was going on in the field, and it was a nice benefit getting your ICOM News in the post four times a year.

But it was a very big expense for ICOM, especially as membership numbers grew and then postal services just seemed to grow more chaotic, in some countries especially, and to be honest we found that a lot of the issues were coming back to us to head office and weren't even reaching the members they were supposed to. So I think it was in about 2015 the paper issue was done away with. We continued to publish a couple of articles online instead but without any real editorial strategy.

And then in the meantime UNESCO asked ICOM to take over the editorial responsibility of its journal *Museum International* so this offered another platform for members to publish content, but more scholarly and professional. And then our communications team developed our e-newsletter, opened our social media accounts and so that sort of took care of the institutional communication that was missing that had been in ICOM News, but we still lacked a space where professionals could share their experience in sort of, you know, shorter form.

And so I suppose that's how ICOM Voices eventually came about – as a professional editorial platform where members could write about their projects in a non-academic, more journalistic, I suppose, format and they could express their views also on topics that museums are dealing with today. So in ICOM Voices we're interested mostly in hearing from professionals working on the field, but there is also some room for opinion pieces from researchers and other museum thinkers.

Mathieu: Does this mean that it's the beginning of the end for traditional peer reviewed journals like *Museum International*?

Aedín: Em, no, I wouldn't say that. I think there's absolutely room for both. *Museum International* for example, it gives the opportunity to dive a bit deeper into specific themes, with more critical thinking, reference to other scholarship and ultimately it does contribute to the development of the museum research today. So, and even just to give you a statistic, readership of *Museum International* has actually grown by 76% between 2020 and 2021 and I'd say a lot of that is down to engaging with more themes such as Gender, LGBTQ, and also the increase in online reading of peer reviewed content too so, you know, there's absolutely room for both of these platforms to co-exist.

Mathieu: Yeah, ICOM Voices maybe gives more chance to those who really want to share quickly their projects without going through the long peer review process, just to get their ideas out there and get some quick feedback and share it to the community.

Aedín: Yeah, absolutely, and that's how the podcast came about as well. It was just sort of like a logical transition. You know, ICOM Voices is already more accessible than *Museum International* but the podcast makes it even a step more accessible because some professionals, they just still don't have the time or possibly the support to write an article for ICOM Voices, so you know, this gives them another platform as well and it leaves room for a bit more banter, spontaneity and a break from the screens as well.

Mathieu: One of the main advantages of ICOM Voices, I think, is that it provides non-ICOM members with a good idea of what are the current trends, topics, and new practices that are being developed in the museum field today.

Now if we move on to you, Laëtitia, can you walk us through what are those main topics and trends that ICOM Voices authors have been writing about? Perhaps if you have a sense of where these authors come from?

Laëtitia: We welcome articles from all ICOM members, about sustainability, heritage protection, intangible heritage, local development and communities, museum professions and museums and Covid-19, and most articles are case studies but they can also be about an exhibition, a conference, a book and even an opinion piece. We receive contributions from all over the world, especially from Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Mathieu: Are readers reacting more to certain ICOM Voices articles when you share them on ICOM social media? I mean do people tend to comment or share more on certain topics or practices?

Laëtitia: ICOM Voices articles are the most read articles on our website. Eh.. we have a high engagement rate on social media and high press coverage for the authors. The most read and shared topics are on the social role of museums and digital projects in museums.

Mathieu: Another characteristic that I think is unique to ICOM Voices, and probably one of the reasons behind its success, is that authors can work and publish in their own native language – provided that they work of course within the three ICOM languages: French, English and Spanish.

Now Virginie, take us through the actual process. Although there is no peer review itself, authors still go through a series of steps to ensure the quality of their articles. Can you take us through the basic steps that you go through with the authors?

Virginie: Firstly, it is indeed important to underline that authors can submit their proposals in English, French and Spanish, the three official languages of ICOM. And as ICOM Voices' objective is to raise the voice of museum professionals around the world, language and inclusion are a real challenge and are really essential.

So we - the editorial team - select abstracts basing our criteria on quality, originality, coherence with the themes Laëtitia just mentioned, and of course, on geographical distribution.

When an article is selected, we contact the author in his/her own language to introduce ICOM Voices more in details, and to present the editorial charter. So our role is to guide all contributors throughout the writing process of their article and the main support to achieve this is found in the direct exchanges we have with each contributor – who, for some of them, are not familiar with this challenging exercise.

As you rightly say, there is no peer-review process, as articles are not academic ones, but based on experiences on the field so it is important to get each author's own style and angle. This is why a close guidance is essential in the process and the editorial work on the manuscript is adapted to each language: we send feedback in English, of course, but also in French and Spanish and it's a good way for us to practise as well! It consists in back-and-forth with each author regarding punctual clarifications, sharpening structures and developments, to make all points as clear and fluent as possible, for readers to get exactly the core of the ideas the author wishes to transmit.

It is rewarding to see that everyone plays the game and gets involved in the process, respecting deadlines and writing requirements for example.

When the final version is ready the article is translated. And then, readers from all over the world get the chance to read worldwide museum experiences in the language they are the most familiar with.

Mathieu: And Virginie, you need to be an ICOM member to submit a paper, right?

Virginie: Yes, you need to be an ICOM member to submit your proposal, but it's important to say as well that ICOM Voices then is public so everyone has access to the article.

Mathieu: So if you are an ICOM member, log into your ICOM space and we look forward to reading your proposal!

Mathieu: One of the truly fantastic things about ICOM Voices and this podcast is that you can actually hear from colleagues and museum practitioners whose voice you wouldn't normally hear and read about in more traditional peer reviewed publications. I'm thinking of museum guides, security guards, cultural mediators... all those professions whose work does not normally involve publishing – much less going through the long process of peer reviewing. You get to know about your colleagues in a more behind-the-scenes context.

Now if we move onto you, Alexandra, can you tell us a little bit more about the overall ICOM communications strategy behind this podcast and also ICOM Voices because it does seem that it offers and responds to new ways to reach out to and engage new audiences.

Alexandra: So Mathieu, it's very interesting that you mention discovering voices and meeting new people in a very intimate way. It reminds me of something that Olly Mann said – he is the co-host of Answer Me This and he produces The Modern Mann: two very popular podcasts. He said that what distinguishes radio from TV is intimacy and what distinguishes a podcast from radio is that it's intimacy plus, because you've chosen it and it's literally in your ears.

And that is something that we wanted to explore with this podcast: it's a new way for us to connect with our members but also, as you mentioned before, to discover new audiences. It is precisely this intimate aspect of podcasts that have helped their popularity, not only among the younger generations – Millennials, Gen Z and Gen X, but also something that we've been noticing, especially since the beginning of the pandemic, is that they've grown in popularity with the plus 55 population as well. It is a population that their majority are not part of the workforce anymore, they have a lot of discretionary time, and they are really attached to this aspect of intimacy that both the radio and podcasts can offer.

So, our aim with developing this podcast that is complementary to ICOM Voices is to, as you said before, bring new voices to the conversation and to connect with our members in a completely different way, something that we have never explored before. We are a global network that has been in isolation and in lockdown for the past almost two years so for us, being able to connect with our members in this new way and feel that we are very close to each other is something that is very important for us.

Mathieu: Now bringing in all these voices from all around the world of course, that must bring a series of challenges. What do you think are some of the main challenges when it comes to working with different languages and creating this podcast in a multilingual, shall I say, context?

Alexandra: For everything that we do in written, the challenge is a little bit easier to deal with because we have everything translated. For the podcast, we made the decision of making three different episodes aside from this pilot episode. Each one of them in one of the official languages of ICOM exclusively and then provide transcripts. This makes it a little bit more challenging than just working with written materials because we have to do the research in the main language of the episode, provide the transcriptions of these episodes, which does take the overall budget of the programme to quite a higher level than we expected, but we do still feel that is absolutely necessary for us to be able to provide the same service that we have provided with ICOM Voices, which is available already in three languages. It makes sense for us that the podcast should be available as well in three languages.

And in terms of challenges, I would say that we also have to take -- it's not really a challenge but -- we have to take into account what has worked for ICOM Voices the most as Laetitia said, there are some topics that have garnered way more attention than others. We need to adapt it to the language chosen for the episode for it to have the maximum impact with the main audience who will listen to the podcast, so for example episode number one is going to be in Spanish and we've decided to go with the topic of intergenerational trauma and native languages as well because we feel that it is a contemporary topic for the region and could really interest listeners in that region.

Mathieu: Well, thank you, Alex, for sharing these insights into ICOM's communication strategy, and also thank you Aedín, Virginie and Laetitia for taking us through the making of ICOM Voices and how it has inspired the making of this podcast.

Now this ends this short pilot episode of the podcast and join me for Episode 1 which will air in March. As Alex just mentioned, the podcast will be in Spanish as I will be joined by two colleagues from Latin America.

Now, if you don't speak Spanish, you need not worry. For each episode you will be able to download the transcripts in all three ICOM languages -- Spanish, French, and English -- which you will be able to find on the ICOM Voices podcast webpage.

For Episode 2, I will be joined by two colleagues from Africa. Discussions will be in French, and the podcast should air in May.

And Episode 3 we will be broadcasting live from Prague during the 26th ICOM General Conference which is scheduled for the week of 20 to 28 August. The podcast will be presented in English and include discussions around some of the topics and issues addressed during the conference.

Until then, goodbye and do stay in touch by following ICOM Voices through the ICOM website, icom.museum: just look for the "get involved" section.