



Test Your Museum IQ

ICOM (*the International Council of Museums*) is the only international organization that represents museums and museum professionals. Headquartered in Paris, ICOM holds international conferences, publishes books and newsletters, and coordinates the work of various international committees related to museum professions. <http://icom.museum/>

Since its creation as part of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) just after World War II, ICOM has revised its definition of the term "museum" eight times. Given its international scope, with individual and museum members from all over the world, ICOM's evolving view of museums both shapes and reflects the field. Below are five of the eight definitions, including the earliest one (1946) and the most recent (2007). The statements below are not in chronological order. See if you can put them in order by matching the dates with the definitions. When you view them in order, the definitions reflect changing perceptions of the nature of museums, their audiences, and their roles.

Place the correct date (1946; 1951; 1974; 2001; 2007) in the blank in front of each definition. The correct answers are at the end of the article.

a. _____ The word museum here denotes any permanent establishment, administered in the general interest, for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction groups

of objects and specimens of cultural value: artistic, historical, scientific and technological collections, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums. Public libraries and public archival institutions maintaining permanent exhibition rooms shall be considered to be museums.

b. _____ A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

c. _____ A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.

d. _____ The word "museums" includes all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.

e. _____ A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.

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Beginning in 1961, and periodically since then, ICOM has specified in more detail the types of institutions that can be considered museums. For example, in 1961 historical monuments and institutions with living collections were added; and in 1974, science centers and planetaria. The most recent addendum, attached to the 2001 definition, is as follows:

- a. The above definition of a museum shall be applied without any limitation arising from the nature of the governing body, the territorial character, the functional structure or the orientation of the collections of the institution concerned.
 - b. In addition to institutions designated as "museums" the following qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:
 - i. natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
 - ii. institutions holding collections of and displaying live specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;
 - iii. science centres and planetaria;
 - iv. non-profit art exhibition galleries;
 - v. nature reserves; conservation institutes and exhibition galleries
- vi. permanently maintained by libraries and archives centres; natural parks;
 - vi. international or national or regional or local museum organisations, ministries or departments or public agencies responsible for museums as per the definition given under this article;
 - vii. non-profit institutions or organisations undertaking conservation research, education, training, documentation and other activities relating to museums and museology;
 - viii. cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);
 - ix. such other institutions as the Executive Council, after seeking the advice of the Advisory Committee, considers as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum, or as supporting museums and professional museum personnel through museological research, education or training.

Development of the Museum Definition according to ICOM Statutes (2007-1946). Retrieved November 2010 from http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html

The Editor 

Answers:

a. 1951; b. 2007; c. 1974; d. 1946; e. 2001