

25 04 28 - Tekst voor mail naar ETHCOM

Toelichting bij verzonden input voor de 4^e consultatieronde voor de herziening van de Ethische Code voor Musea



Dear members of ETHCOM,

We did send our feedback form on the 2nd draft of the reviewed Code of Ethics, after consulting our members. In the discussion we also met a few broader issues that were not easy to fit in the structure of the form. Therefore, we will share them with you through this email.

1. Practical use of the code as framework and touchstone

Questions were raised concerning the way the new code can be used in the museum field. The current code serves as a framework and touchstone in making decisions and opinions by the National Ethics Commission. The new code is more about aspirations, so when does a museum meet the standards of the code? When is it 'sufficient'?

And what if a museum doesn't manage to meet (all) the standards?

Should we rather treat the new code as starting point in conversations on ethical conduct?

2. Relation Code of Ethics – standards & guidelines?

Several members asked about the status of the standards & guidelines, like mentioned in the footnotes of the Code. We agree that on certain topics additional guidance is needed to be able to apply the more general statements in the Code in the reality of the daily museum work. But we want to ask you to clarify the status of those standards & guidelines. Do they belong to the Code? So, if you sign for the Code, are you also expected to follow the mentioned standards and guidelines? Or do they have a more non-committal nature?

3. Comments on 4.3

Statement 4.3 raised most discussion among our members, in particular the sentence: "Objects should always be obtained with the consent of their source community."

This raises many questions, and we foresee many impossible situations in practice. We fully support the importance of searching consent of communities of origin. But when does this apply, and to which objects? What if objects have already been in collections for a very long time, or have traded places multiple times, or are known to have been sold by a source community? This, in addition to the question what qualifies as a source community. This seems to be written for colonial objects, understandably, but it has not - and cannot- be defined as such. E.g. should the Netherlands be seen as the source community of a Van Gogh painting? Or France, if he painted it during his French period? This is probably not intended. Also: what if the original source community in a certain area has long since been replaced by successors with different cultural traditions and interests?

We think it should be more clearly defined in which cases this applies.

We suggest in our proposal for improvement to choose a wording that clearly calls on museums to make an effort on seeking consent of the community of origin, but in a realistic and do-able way.

Good luck with all the work awaiting you when the 'harvest' of this consultation is reaching you. And we look forward to the final text.

Best regards on behalf of the board and all the Dutch participants in this consultation round.

Secretariat ICOM Netherlands | Arja van Veldhuizen