

**My adventurous life
with
ICOFOM, museology, museologists
and anti-museologists, giving special reference to
ICOFOM Study Series**

**A Very Personal View
of a Very Small Piece of the Contemporary History of Museology,
a Study Which Became,
Due to the Unpredictable Events
of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century,
a Very Personal Concern that Evolved into a Pursuit in the Heart and Mind
of
Vinoš Sofka
Swedish Citizen of Czech Origin
written down by himself
in April of 1995
at the occasion of the reprint of all issues
of ICOFOM Study Series 1983–1991**

- 1 *Necessary information about the reason and motives for writing this tract, and the conditions and circumstances one must take into account to understand it.*
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"Would you write down some reminiscences of your adventurous life with ICOFOM and museology? I would like to publish them in the re-edition of our ICOFOM Study Series", said Martin Schärer, the governing Chairman of the International Committee for Museology of ICOM (ICOFOM) and the initiator of publishing all ISS volumes as collected works, in a call to me sometime before the turn of the year 1994-1995. "Otherwise, everything you thought, intended, and experienced, both good and bad, enjoyable and fun, or sad, annoying or disappointing, and that you tried to do and really carried out during your time in the Committee, and especially as its Chairman and Editor of its three periodical publications, will be for got ten and lost", he added.

He was right, I thought, even if I did not feel much like writing memoirs. I did not find myself "in the right memorial age" yet. Moreover, I was overwhelmed with many urgent tasks, in full action for the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and had very little time. In addition, I had to take care of my new, latest responsibility, the UNESCO Chair of Museology and World Heritage at Ma-

saryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. But I also learned a lesson from the peculiar course of my life: you never know when things will unexpectedly change and you will never again have the opportunity to do what you can do now.

Thus, I agreed to write – but not an historical study, based on research and critical analysis of all available sources: declarations, programmes, plans, minutes or statements. My contribution to the history of the Committee should be *my own story*, telling about my own ideas, reflections, reactions, observations and experiences, as I remembered them. It would be a new, additional source, so to say, completing the existing ones. A source which should be commented on, and I hoped, even enlarged with stories written by other fellow combatants in the struggle for museology and in the search for its foundations. Only then could we get a true picture of the atmosphere, conditions, events and achievements of the period of ICOFOM when, from a little group of some 30-40 persons we became, towards the end of the 80s, an important body of ICOM with over one thousand members from almost 90 countries, who, devoted to their task and museological mission, continue their work today.

However, even limited to my own story, the field to be mapped is enormous – and therefore I will concentrate now only on our pre-prints, *ICOFOM Study Series (ISS)*, which are here the focus of our interest, and on everything related to their genesis, publishing and continued existence.

This makes the task easier to tackle, but still not entirely simple: ISS, designed as the pre-prints for the annual symposia of ICOFOM, have become the most important instrument in carrying out the Committee's courageous research programme and distributing its results. Focused in the first decade on the search for the foundations of museology, this programme is still ongoing and has many museological issues to address in the years to come.

The programme, and ISS, were and are, of course, not separated from life around them. The Committee itself, a body of people interested in, and many of them devoted to museology and to their professional mission, was and is not simply an association which organizes one scientific meeting a year. It has become a living organism, with more and more participants involved in its much broader action. The professional contacts among them, based on common interests, have developed during the years to lasting relationships of friendship, and an atmosphere of family spirit took over.

All this happened during a very special time that erupted a few years after the Second World War and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989: the divided world with its iron curtain and cold war tensions, fear of a nuclear conflict, lack of democracy and neglect of human rights in many of its parts, did not create favourable conditions for free contacts, open discussion and broad Committee action over borders in an international organisation, even if this organisation, ICOM, is non-governmental and thus was theoretically independent of the geopolitical reality among the states. This was, of course, fiction: ICOM had to ac-

cept that its national committees were subject to the political conditions of their countries, and some of them were not free, nor could ICOM's international bodies ignore super-power positions, which only slowly, by recognition of an ongoing globalization of the world and increasing interdependence in the 80s, switched from confrontation to an awareness that collaboration was strongly needed. Nevertheless, in spite of these circumstances, through the years ICOFOM became an oasis in the confrontational world, where – as Villy Toft Jensen, a real ICOFOM veteran, stated at one of our gatherings in the middle of the 80s – people from East and West met, as if this outer world of suspicion, mistrust and disbelief did not exist, and in an atmosphere of understanding, tolerance and friendship a round their common concern, exchanged ideas and worked together towards their common goal. And ICOFOM, having since 1982 a political refugee from Czechoslovakia who received asylum in Sweden as Chair and editor of its periodicals, was certainly a unique international body.

I have shared with ICOFOM its joys and sorrows ever since 1978. The duties as editor (1979), member of the Board (1980) and Chairman (1982-1989) brought both challenge and responsibility. For me, they were first of all an expression of trust, recognition and friendship. I had the privilege of being a part of an enthusiastic world team, which was a real dream to lead. We have to keep together our big family and preserve its memory. I will, with pleasure, try to contribute to this aim with a modest attempt related to our ISS. I hope all my old friends will then be prompted to take part in writing down the history of ICOFOM.

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- 2 *Additional information*
to get acquainted with the author of this tract,
his background, characteristics, life experience and achievements,
with special emphasis on his museological commitment,
necessary to grasp his message and judge
the relevance and usefulness of his story as a source of ICOFOM history.
Phases: Czech – Swedish – Mixed
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It is difficult to say whether it was by chance, by fortune, or by fate, that my life became so deeply and intimately associated with museums, museology and museologists. I can see many factors on the long road that led to this lasting relation, from the extraordinary external conditions that I had to deal with, to my back ground, personal disposition, experience, and the good and the bad people I met. I feel that all of them played some role in forming my very complex past.

Looking back, I can, however, state with absolute certainty that in my youth, when finishing my secondary school and reflecting on the direction of my life, and an appropriate professional education or training, there was not among all alternatives a single one related to the field in which I am now involved up to the ears. I decided then, at the turn of 1947-48, to study law and become *lawyer*, aiming eventually for a career in the diplomatic services.

Now in 1995, forty-seven years later, I am *museologist*, and certain that I would never have become one if I had not lived in a time governed by two perverted ideological and political systems – the National-Socialist rule of terror in Germany, and the Soviet Union-based totalitarian communist supremacy – which, usurping for themselves, without any respect for human dignity, authority over life and death in theirs' and others' nations, took from people, or restricted severely, their human rights – those of free thought, free speech and all others – and of decision over them selves and their own destiny. This was the decisive factor, but not the only one, the starting point on the tortuous, winding path of my life.

The three geopolitical phases of the author's life

It would be a long story to render an account of all I went through in my life, and I have to refrain from it here. From my birth in Czechoslovakia and a pleasant childhood there, to the German occupation of my homeland and Hitler's reign of horror in 1939-1945, then to the Communist coup d'état in 1948, starting another era of terror under Stalin and his successors, and finally to the exciting but short Prague Spring in 1968, promising restoration of democracy and human dignity, there were many happy days of joy and hope, but also days of sorrow and despair.

Then, after this Czech phase of my life came the Swedish phase, when I decided, after the invasion of my country on 21 August 1968 by the military forces of the USSR and other states of the socialistic bloc, to leave and continue my life in exile as political refugee in Sweden, the country which, having offered me and my family asylum, a home and work, became my new, second homeland where I have lived since the end of 1968, and in 1976 acquired Swedish citizenship.

The third phase of my life, beginning with the "Velvet revolution" in my old homeland at the end of 1989, is mixed, both Czech, Swedish, and international, filled with new exciting tasks, recognition and experience, but also the use of the wisdom of life collected during the long time which has passed.

Czech phase: The author's three professions – and none too many

Why I have three professions – that of a *lawyer*, another of a *worker and brick layer* and, finally, the last and lasting one of a *museologist* – is an other feature of my life which is not at all easy to explain. Being more relevant to our museological contemplation, I will try to give a short answer:

- I became *lawyer* by receiving my doctor's degree in jurisprudence (JUDr, LLD) at Charles University in Prague in 1952. In the best style of the regime's irrational contradictions, I could hear, however, during the procedure regarding the graduates' obligatory placement for three years in different offices, which took place immediately after the graduation ceremony, the message of the University's political official who watched over the students' political and ideological purity: "There is no employment for you as a lawyer".

As usual no explanation was given, and I could only guess what the reason was. Having been arrested during my studies in the spring of 1950, and put in prison for almost two months for psychological mellowing with other 8-12 real criminals in a very small cell with one bed and open toilet, to confess suspected treasonous activities aimed at overthrowing the government of workers and peasants as the Communist Party cynically called its oppressive rule, I assumed that this could be one of them. I learned about the other, real reason 16 years later, in the free atmosphere of the Prague Spring: In the political evaluation of myself, the Party Committee at the University, composed of my fellow co-students, came to the conclusion in 1952 that during my studies I was "in the forefront of the central reactionary anti-socialist cell at the University aiming to overthrow" – again – "the regime". This stain on my record, which was kept secret, followed me, however, everywhere during the Czech socialist phase of my life until 1968, and even thereafter, when in the 80s I visited the country as Swedish citizen and always had the secret police at my heels. Now, as before, they forgot to tell me what extraordinary hostile exploits they expected from me, and I never found out how to satisfy their sick imagination.

- With the lawyer career eliminated, but convinced that I was able to survive without communist permission, I took employment as a *worker* at the municipal building enterprise in my native city. After one year there I felt that I could do a more qualified job and asked for permission to become a *bricklayer*. I received my certificate in 1954, and with that my second profession.

- At the age of 27, I became employed in November 1956 by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, at its Archaeological Institute in Brno, as head of its administration and organisation department and moved thus into the class category of *working intelligentsia*. In the name of absurdities, even here an opportunity appeared for the power=holders to demonstrate their supremacy and right to supervise. An ongoing campaign with anonymous letters against the director and vice-director immediately added me to its repertoire with an improved assortment of my anti-socialistic crimes. Two special commissions, one of the Party and the other of the secret police, summoned or contacted me from time to time during the period 1957-1962 to remind me about my trespasses and propose some corrective measures – with the exception of offering me Party membership. This "punishment" was a benefit for me as was my bricklayer-worker profession, which nobody could take from me. It gave me some kind of freedom. I was spared from "prostituting" my self to hold on to my "refined" intellectual job, as had to do those who depended on the only profession they

had if they were not ready to risk changing a desk job for a manual one.

For a change, a sad event, the death at the end of 1962 of the Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences, Prof. Jaroslav Böhm, brought a diametrically different result for me: not a Kafkaesque nightmare but a contradiction turned favourable. Böhm was organizing the Celebrations of the 1100th anniversary of the beginning of Slavonic literature in 1963, declared a World Commemorative Year by UNESCO. It was an enormous project with an international conference, splendid publications, and the establishment of three large National historic parks on the sites in south Moravia of archaeological excavations from the Great Moravian period in my country, carried out by my institution, the University and the Moravian Museum, all in Brno. The project included a large exhibition to be shown in three places in Czechoslovakia, one of them being the Castle of the Bohemian Kings in Prague. There was very little time and emergency measures were necessary. In this critical situation the Academy, and even the government and the Party, decided to entrust me, the incorrigible, with the responsibility for organizing, leading and carrying out the project. For me it was great opportunity, enhanced by exciting collaboration with an excellent team of eminent scientists, architects, artists, producers, educators and media specialists. The result was of high quality and innovative, and a huge success. In the atmosphere of the approaching Prague Spring, international contacts increased and we received requests to bring the Great Moravian exhibition to several countries. As the only specialist in this field in the Academy, I had to take care of reinstalling the exhibition on its itinerary to Greece, Austria, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and in 1968 to both Berlins – to allow me to do this was completely unthinkable some years earlier.

I describe this event thoroughly, because it played a central role in my metamorphosis into a *museologist*. The project, with its many elements of museum work, was a source of valuable knowledge and experience. It called for a common philosophical and theoretical basis for the working team's successful communication and action. Completed with a lawyer's sense for a systematic and interdisciplinary approach, an administrator's managerial methods, and a bricklayer's experience of craftsmanship and ordinary peoples' wisdom, it became my point of departure for museological thinking. This was discovered very early by Dr Jan Jelínek, Director of the Moravian Museum, Chairman of the ICOM Advisory Committee, and later President of ICOM, who surprised me in the spring of 1968 by asking if I would be willing to head an International UNESCO Training Center of Museography, which he would establish in Czechoslovakia as contribution to UNESCO's world activities. This was one of several very attractive invitations to me during the Prague Spring, which were never to happen because of the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968.

Setting up the Great Moravian exhibition in different countries gave the project international recognition as a new model for large exchange exhibitions, with an other uncalculated effect appreciated with deep gratitude by my family and my self, when we decided to go into exile and leave our homeland: the invitations from the institutions and countries where I had recently set up "my exhibi-

tion" to come and work with them. Among them was one from the Swedish Central Board of National Monuments and Sites, and from the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. We accepted this invitation and arrived on 22 December 1968 in Uppsala.

Swedish phase: Museums and museology become the author's main concern

I assume that a decision to move from a native country to another one will always be a difficult step, even if it should someday become a recognized human right all over the world, regardless of the reason for such a decision. In our situation, created by outer forces, it had another character – that of not being willing to continue our lives under the old repressive regime, which now had returned to power by force. It brought consequences touching not only us, but many others, too. Living now abroad, we still had to do, indirectly, with a continued totalitarian system in our old country, where we, my wife and I, were condemned to two years' prison and confiscation of all our property. We lost thus the evidence of our past, all the memories of it, to express it in a museological language. Our contacts with relatives who remained in the country were very limited: we could not visit them nor they us, our telephone calls to the country were tapped, correspondence controlled. From time to time, we were also checked by "visitors" coming to Sweden from Czechoslovakia, unknown to us, but claiming that they were sent by common friends.

In Sweden, we started a new life in a new milieu from scratch. We owned almost nothing, but we had the advantage of having jobs. For me it was work in a new branch, a central national museum, which I had seen before in close contact only when the Great Moravian exhibition was set up there in 1967. I had many good friends in Sweden from that time, and from the time when I organized in Czechoslovakia the Swedish exchange exhibition on Swedish Golden Treasures and the Art of the Vikings in 1968 in Brno and Prague.

I became very quickly involved in the museum's activities and in the ongoing project on improvement of museum work and organization. I set up structures that had been lacking, and became head of the museum's economic planning and administration section in 1971, reorganized in 1973 to become the department for exhibitions, museum programming, economic planning and administration. I took care of many exhibitions, both Swedish and from abroad, along with other museum projects. Taking on responsibility for the museum's management department in 1975, and for the Department for coordination and museum development in 1981, brought ever increasing involvement, but again challenge and experience, too.

As for museology, the need for theory in the museum's practical work became more and more apparent for me now when working in the branch, and I tried to promote museology in my museum and elsewhere.

My first attempt in Sweden was in December 1969, after only one year in the country. The effort to convince the Director's collegium in my museum, the

Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, about the need for museology had a peculiar fate, which signalled to me the difficulties that the struggle for museology will encounter. After presentation of an analytical study of the current aims and tasks of the museum which I was asked to do, and of a proposal of measures to be taken among which I included the need for research in museology, the discussion started with the Director's curious question: "What is this museology? I never heard the word!" – which some others had not either – and ended with a friendly recommendation to me from one of the eminent curators attending the session: "Forget these eccentricities from the continent, Vinos!"

However, this was not the final act of the play. One day, some five or six years after the collegium session in 1969, an accidental meeting in the city with the curator who dropped the remarkable statement on "continental eccentricities" was the epilogue. With a dismal expression on her face, she told me that she regretted very much what she had said. Having no idea what she was speaking about, amazed, I asked what it was. "Our collegium in 1969", she answered, "I know now that we have lost, thanks to my short-sightedness, at least five years in developing our museum work". This was an honest admission and, I felt, a correct judgement, which gave me real satisfaction. And as to the peculiar – it seemed to me – question about museology put by the Director, an explanation came 25 years later, as you will soon see.

In 1976, an encouraging sign of museological awakening was an invitation to me to write an article about museology from an international perspective for a handbook on "*Museiteknik (Museum techniques)*" to be published in connection with a course at Uppsala University. The proposal to write, with reference to museological activities outside Sweden, which must be reported on, came in the last minute before printing the book, and was directed to me, because I came from the continent and was thus supposed to know about this phenomenon. In the review of the handbook, published in the periodical of the Swedish Museum Association *SMF Nytt*, the museological endeavours in the world described in my article seemed to have the same effect on the unfortunate reviewer as the toreador's red cape in the bullring. In a short, irritated and deprecatory statement, he could only burst out: "Protect us from 'museology' and other quasi-sciences!" But this time, a strong reaction of two eminent museum personalities reminded the museum community that it is necessary to leave the local duck-pond and look around at what is happening in the big world, and opened the field for discussion. Even this was just one instalment to be continued with happy endings in 1988 and in 1994!

I did not give up and continued to spread the museological message, encouraging reflection on it. I was met more and more with increasingly positive response.

In my museum things started to happen *in re* museology. A project with an experimental activity in this field began in July 1979. In our budget, proposals were presented to the government for 1980/1981 to give museology a firm

place, and a program on "Museikunskap (Museum skills)" was introduced in 1981/1982. An analytical study on publishing activities of the museum, dated 6 November 1981, took up museological publications in a special section: ideas about the international journal *Museological Working Papers*, started in 1980; a Swedish report series, later called *Sagt–Hänt–Meddelat (Said, Happened, Informed)*; and an information bulletin and research papers in museology were proposed. A museology section came to the world as a part of my Department of coordination and museum development, established in 1981. The enormous scope of my tasks, the limited personnel and financial resources, and a still lukewarm interest for museology in museum work, did not, however, allow development of any concentrated action. But the recognition of the existence of the subject facilitated my participation in international museology activities, and made it possible to import knowledge and experience to my second homeland.

Since 1978, I had been active in ICOM, and its International Committee for Museology. Thanks to the generous support of my museum, and especially its Director, who now understood what museology meant and what it was good for, I could establish collaboration between this Committee and the museum, with mutual benefits, especially for museology.

Still in Sweden, first steps were undertaken at the beginning of the 80s to introduce museological training at the Universities in Umeå and, later on, in Gothenburg. I was invited to participate in planning work for these programmes, called at the very beginning cautiously "Museikunskap (Museum skills)" in Umeå, and "Museivetenskap (Museum science)" in Gothenburg. Our efforts, the museum director's and mine, to draw the attention of cultural authorities, especially of Statens Kulturråd (National Council of Culture), and first of all of some research councils to museology and get it introduced as subject of scientific studies brought an important result in the middle of 80s: a position of research assistant in museology was created by the Humanistisk-Samhällsvetenskapliga Forskningsrådet (Swedish Council for Research in Humanistic and Social Sciences), and was then filled by Per-Uno Ågren at Umeå University. In 1988 – the year of a museology boom in the world which started after ICOFOM's evaluation of almost a hundred papers concluded with a declaration, in agreement with the criteria of the theory of science, that museology is a scientific discipline in an embryonic stage – the first big international symposium, where half of the panel of experts were leading ICOFOM museologists, took place in Umeå, delving into the question: What is museology? There, at a special Swedish seminar, in a brilliant speech in defence of museology and in favour of an active use of it, I could hear Dr Carl Cullberg, leading Swedish museum curator, say that my article published in 1976 is the first "museological classic work" in Sweden and Scandinavia – a statement documenting the change in Swedish museum thinking during the intervening decade. It took, however, more than 15 years, until 1993, when a convinced and conscious drive for museology as a needed scientific discipline started in Sweden and is still ongoing.

In the meanwhile, a joyful event for me personally, and for museology in its consequence, took place in 1991. Uppsala University decided to confer on me, as a recognition for contributions to the development of international museology, to cultural collaboration between people, and to Sweden, a honorary doctor's degree in philosophy, PhD h.c. This respected university's favourable position on museology was indeed a valuable support regarding the need for theory in the field of cultural and natural heritage.

At a meeting in December 1994 in Stockholm, a first attempt at a united approach to establish museological research in Sweden took place under an impressive participation of representatives for several research councils, universities, museums and organizations of museum employees. I listened with mixed feelings to the discussion: pleasant feelings seeing that finally the opinion had turned to the benefit of museology, and unsatisfied ones because no attention at all, or very little, was given to the extensive international research in museology, carried out by ICOFOM, which was organised from my museum in Stockholm, and published and disseminated all over the world with strong Swedish support. As a by-product, the meeting contributed to my own life's story with the epilogue to the two events in 1969 and 1976, which happened at the very beginning of my museological endeavours in Sweden:

In his introductory historical review of the development of museological ideas and thinking in the country, Per-Uno Ågren, Director of the Institute of Museology at Umeå University, informed the participants that the contemporary, modern concept of museology was introduced in Sweden, and Scandinavia, by me – a statement, which for me put the story with "continental eccentricities" from the end of 1969 in a totally new light, and suddenly made fully understandable the question which was raised by the Director when chairing the collegium of my museum: "What is this museology? I never heard the word!" How could he know when it had not yet passed import clearing procedures?

Continuing then his report with an overview of different concepts of museology in the world, and to my embarrassment, he compared "my definition" from 1976 – you remember I hope the story about the book on *Museiteknik* – with concepts of eminent museology thinkers throughout all time. That countered forever the bad taste I had from the first professional, more or less official, Swedish reaction to my modest information about museology from an international perspective given in that book which inspired the reviewer to say no more than to implore protection "from 'museology' and other quasi-sciences!" It was clear, this standpoint had definitely lost ground in Sweden!

Mixed phase:

The author makes use of his life's uncommon path and experience

Political, economic, social, and cultural upheavals during the years 1985 to 1989 in Europe and the Soviet Union, which totally changed the world, launched the third phase of my life.

My own activities became substantially influenced by these events. The new free atmosphere opened possibilities in ICOM for intensive international collaboration in making practical use of museology, particularly when addressing the serious transition problems of the countries in the former Socialist bloc. The Czechoslovak ICOM Committee was first to request assistance from ICOM, asking for my personal participation. I became an adviser in museum and heritage matters to the Czech Ministry of Culture and have been in close contact with the Czech museum field since 1990. At Masaryk University in Brno, where the International Summer School of Museology was already established in 1987 as a UNESCO participation programme, I was appointed Chairperson of the School's Scientific and Pedagogical Council in 1990. At the same time, my museological interests in Sweden continued at my museum, in collaboration with university training programmes, especially in Gothenburg and in a new museology programme at Stockholm University, and in assisting in attempts to establish a museology research programme in the country, as mentioned above. On the international level, the dissemination of the museological message at different conferences, and in personal lectures or seminars, increased enormously with invitations from all over the world.

In 1994, the Director General of UNESCO and the Rector of Masaryk University decided to establish the UNESCO Chair of Museology and the World Heritage in Brno, Czech Republic, as the first UNESCO Chair with this specific orientation in the world. They agreed to entrust me with its leadership by appointing me to the position of Chairholder. This task opens new possibilities to further advance and improve museology and increase its active role in social and human development through out the world. It creates a firm base for the international museum community and its qualified action through broad research, documentation, publication and training programmes, and international interdisciplinary endeavours to respond to the problems raised in the process of ongoing globalization and mutual inter-dependencies. The aim to successively transform this institution in the future into a UNESCO Centre for Advanced Studies and Research in Museology and the World Heritage will, when achieved, be the fulfilment of the dream drafted in my first contribution to the discussion on museology in ICOfoM in Poland in 1978.

3 *Museological confusion is investigated
by a new International Committee of ICOM,
which, after a short but enthusiastic post-natal period
gets into serious trouble and approaches collapse,
only to wake up miraculously to a life of rewarding advances.
The author gets in touch with ICOM and becomes addicted to museology.*

Would anybody come? Would anybody even write?

What in heaven's name can we do now, two months before the meeting?

Dismal thoughts were rushing in my head during a hasty visit in Paris at the end of August 1982. I came there as the person appointed by Jan Jelínek, the Chairman of the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM), to conduct the planned symposium on 20–22 October on *The system of museology and interdisciplinarity*, in conjunction with the Committee's annual meeting, and was just informed by the Secretary of the Committee, André Desvallées, and his collaborator and Secretary of the 1982 meeting, Gérard Turpin, that thanks to Georges-Henri Rivière's endeavours and the generosity of the Direction des Musées de France, there were money and facilities to arrange the meeting, but that no steps had been taken to prepare the symposium itself. Had there been a misunderstanding in the direction of ICOFOM, or was there some other reason?

There was no time to brood over subtleties – emergency action was needed to overcome the current crisis and to avoid the young Committee's collapse. How did things get so bad?

Moscow 1977

ICOFOM comes to the world – and the author joins it "by means of conspiracy"

The International Committee for Museology, now baptised ICOFOM, was founded five years earlier. It held its first constitutive meeting at the 12th General Conference of ICOM in Moscow, in 1977. Formally, an initiative of the Advisory Committee of ICOM in 1976 laid the ground for the establishment of ICOFOM. Cleverly avoiding any definition of what museology actually is, the recommendation stated:

Every branch of professional activity needs to be studied, developed and adapted to changing contemporary conditions – and not least that of museology. To pursue the aims of distributing knowledge of modern museological ideas and to help in different fields of museological development, will be the programme of the ICOM International Committee for Museology.

I can't remember how, but information about this event already reached me in 1977 and aroused my interest: Here was the long-sought occasion to receive museological enlightenment! I arranged my membership in ICOM in my exile country, now officially as a Swedish citizen since the year before. Through the Swedish National Committee I became a member of ICOM in May 1978, and intended to participate in the work of the new museology committee.

This intention had, however, to be put on ice for a time. The reason was the discovery that the Chairman of this Committee was Dr Jan Jelínek from Czechoslovakia. Once again, my newly won freedom seemed to be limited by influences from the other side of the iron curtain. Trained in the manner of real so-

cialistic thinking, I realized that my status of political refugee in Sweden, who still held in Czech citizenship and was condemned to prison in Czechoslovakia for the crime of having left the country without permission, a matter in principle totally irrelevant to my rights as ICOM member, would be a very unpleasant matter for Jan Jelínek to return home with. I knew him from my Great Moravian project in 1962-1968, and especially his attractive offer in 1968 to be the director of a UNESCO International Centre for Museography in Brno, and I knew that I could not impose a *fait accompli* by appearing at an ICOFOM meeting without speaking with him in advance and knowing his opinion. I understood the dilemma and was ready, if he should show any sign of being exposed to danger, to renounce the museology committee and join the ICOM International Committee for Exchange of Exhibitions.

In the style of the best conspiracy drama I tried to find an occasion to talk with him. I could not call him, nor could I write to him – my phone calls were tapped and my letters read by others in Czechoslovakia before, if at all, they reached the addressees. Through the Swedish ICOM channels I was told that Dr Jelínek would hold a lecture at a Nobel Symposium in Bofors in the spring of 1978. I could not, of course, attend this meeting, because I assumed that representatives of the Czechoslovak Embassy would be present to listen to Jelínek and to check his contacts – but a message through a Swedish participant delivered to Jelínek in Bofors resulted in an agreement by phone to a secret meeting on his way by car from Bofors to Stockholm, during a short stay in Strängnäs. I should be there, and Jelínek and I would have a talk in the cathedral. In spite of our lack of experience in this field of conspiracy we succeeded: We met (without having had to dress as monks or bishops) just to hear from one another that we both wished to collaborate and thus I should apply through Sweden to ICOM Headquarters in Paris for membership in ICOFOM. In Prague the explanation should be that I was a "Swedish representative" on the Committee, which was not correct according to ICOM Statutes, but corresponded fully with the concept of ICOM membership in the communist countries, where it was the Party and State administration which approved who could be ICOM members of the country and what trips abroad they could take.

We met once again at that time, through another conspiracy, arranged by Sweden's member of the Executive Council of ICOM, Ulla Keding Olofsson, at the occasion of a party for Dr Jelínek in Stockholm. This time we should meet as if by accident (and thus for the Czech authorities in principle for the first time in Sweden), through an invitation to me along with leading Swedish museum people. Jelínek invited me at this occasion officially to ICOFOM's meeting in Poland and we could settle my participation there. This was kind and courageous – but not without an additional problem, this time a real Eastern bloc one for me.

Having double citizenship at that time: the newly gained Swedish, and the old Czechoslovak, which I could not get rid of – we were intentionally kept in citizenship as hostage – I had no Swedish protection in Czechoslovakia and was, in addition, in danger in other countries belonging to the socialistic bloc of being

extradited to my former homeland as a criminal to serve the two years' prison sentence to which I was condemned there. Fortunately, there were differences between the socialist countries. Through the Polish diplomatic representation in Sweden, I was confidentially assured that my personal freedom and integrity would not be encroached during my stay at the ICOFOM conference in Poland, and moreover, they promised to arrange for us, myself and my wife, an apartment at the Royal Castle, Wawel, in Kraków for a meeting between my wife and her seriously ill mother who lived in Czechoslovakia. Her son had brought her to this meeting and thus they could all be together after so many years' separation when we could not visit our home country. My wife's mother died three months later and we never forgot the Polish generosity, totally different from our own country, which never gave my wife permission to go to her mother's funeral, nor had permission been granted when her father died a few years before.

Poland 1978

The author calls for an intellectual crusade to discover what museology is:

"If we don't know – if we have doubts – then we find out!"

My participation at the second meeting of ICOFOM, which took place in Poland was, in this very special atmosphere, an unforgettable experience. Apart from Professor Jelínek I met some of the great and interesting names of the museum world: Professor Lorenz, Professor Piotrovski, Dr Irina Antonova, Dr Dabrowski, Dr Wolfgang Klausewitz, Dr Awraam Razgon, Dr Rymaszewski – the driving force of the gathering, and Villy Toft Jensen. All together we were about twenty persons. We had good talks, but the longed-for information about museology did not come. My "private interrogations" revealed that there was no common opinion about the concept of museology – "not much meat on the bone" at all. At the symposium on *Possibilities and limits in scientific research typical for museums* the seven presented papers and reports strictly followed the topic analysing the situation of different sciences related to museum collections. In only one paper, given by the Russian, or Soviet if you will, museologist and philosopher Awraam Razgon, was there an attempt to pick up and develop some museological aspects. I felt dissatisfied and raised several questions in the discussions: What is museology? What is a museology committee for? And what is our aim? The answers varied so greatly that it was alarming. During the night after the first day of our symposium, I sat down and prepared my intervention. Summing up the situation in general, I stressed the urgent need for museological research and training based on its results, and forwarded the idea of an international institute for museology and of a journal as a forum for international discussion on museology. People were interested, and approved my proposals enthusiastically.

My paper called *Research in and on the Museum* can be found published with the other contributions to the symposium in the volume of ICOFOM prints which appeared 1978 in Brno. I leaf through it now, when trying to collect my memories, and – I must admit – feel proud and satisfied. Starting with the topic of the symposium on research in museums, the paper argues for the need for theory

as a basis for practical museum work, and thus for necessary museological research, and presents a complex programme of action to this end. It became the springboard for the coming activities of the Committee, and even personally for me in my very practical and broad museum work in Sweden, and in ICOFOM, especially as its Chairman since 1982. Having been prodded by the emergency situation at the meeting I felt forced to react. The reflection from the night set up a vision of what I wished to see accomplished. Thanks to my active, faithful and above all clever collaborators from all corners of the world in the ICOFOM team, we carried out the study on the foundations of museology during the years which followed, completed and worked out the concept of museology, and brought to reality several parts of the dream presented in my début in the international museology arena on 26 September 1978 in Nieborów in Poland.

During the meeting the Committee had once more the opportunity to test the political possibilities and limitations for its action in the divided world. The election of a new Secretary of the Committee was on the agenda. We should think about it over night. Dr Razgon, having thought with no regard to conformity, told me in the morning that he felt that I should take over the office and that he would propose this to the Chairman. I realized that a political catastrophe was approaching. Poor Professor Jelínek was having a hard time with me in the Committee. The day before, in a private talk about the Committee's affairs with Irina Antonova, Jelínek (as he told me in secret afterwards), after trying to explain for her my stay in Sweden stressing my presumed economic interests, heard from her, a Soviet citizen, a totally unexpected answer: "It's his own thing where he lives, isn't it?" Now, moreover, Razgon, the other Soviet "representative", came with a proposal that, if approved – and this was completely possible with the very positive position of our Polish hosts and other participants towards me – would cause mayhem in Czechoslovakia, where the atmosphere was evidently more hard-line than in the USSR. "Can you imagine me coming home and reporting to the relevant authority, which I can't avoid doing as you know, that the Secretary of my Committee is Vиноš Sofka?" sighed Jan Jelínek with resignation.

A short, open discussion between Jelínek, Klausewitz and myself resulted in an agreement that the candidacy of Professor Klausewitz should be proposed. The Committee then unanimously approved it, and the explosive situation was defused. We realized that my involvement in different activities of ICOFOM would be easier and develop in better conditions when I am not Secretary; holding an office would probably cause more trouble and damage than good. With this secret conspiratorial plat form settled, we bade farewell to Poland and returned home to our parts of the world so fundamentally different.

The meeting in Poland was not the starting point of my "affair" with museology; this can be found at the very beginning of my work in the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm in 1969, and during the years which followed. The Polish gathering had another significance: It was the real point of departure for my deep involvement with museology and action in favour of it. I recognised that ICOFOM and its international outreach provided at that time

the only accessible and acceptable platform to study and analyse, from a holistic approach, the matter of museology, its essence and concept, relation to man, society and its world, and to the cultural and natural heritage. I became aware that the Committee was in a relatively free relation to other spheres of power, probably because it took care of matters which were not classified by them as of special importance or danger. Concluding that museums have a space for action, and being convinced that they and their collections are a socio-cultural resource not efficiently used, with a hidden potential in stored memory and experience, and in their qualified staff, I came to see that museology as the theoretical base for museum work, and ICOFOM as the only international professional body bringing together specialists in this field, have a unique opportunity to assist in increasing the contribution of museums to the solution of the problems the world community was facing at that time and will probably face on a larger scale in the future.

Torgiano 1979, Mexico City 1980 – and Paris 1982

The Committee's ups and downs in 1979–1982

are met by a resolute decision of the author to turn the poor odds into good ones when everything seems almost lost

What happened after the meeting in Poland?

Between the meetings in Italy 1979 and in Mexico 1980 the fermentation continued even as the first growing pains appeared.

- Before going to sunny Italy, an *ad hoc* participation as the representative of ICOFOM at the meeting of the ICOM International Committee for Training of Personnel (ICTOP) in Leicester, UK, in September 1979, which I undertook at the request of Jan Jelínek, gave me an unexpected occasion to get acquainted with ICOM's very complex internal relations, and especially the leading members' extremely varying personal attitudes towards the need for theory in museum work in general, and to museology in particular. It was a useful lesson, with a warning to me that promoting museology as a useful tool in museum peoples' work would not always be easy sailing, but – and more often – a struggle against the cemented anti=theoretical position of some members of the profession rather than a discussion for which they lacked factual, objective arguments.

You wonder what happened in Leicester?

Proud of ICOFOM's promising meeting in Poland, I delivered, invited by ICTOP's Chairman Jan Cuypers, a report about our intentions and programme. A loud reaction came immediately from the disappointed – as always the understanding or the tolerant kept quiet, "ashamed" about their positive standpoints. In rapid order I listened to an irritated Georges-Henri Rivière, who among other objections could not understand that ICOFOM established a research programme and could start a journal with me as Editor without having being in contact with him, followed by a very aggressive director of the Reinwardt

Academy in the Netherlands who requested the abolition of ICOFOM, preferably immediately, being of the opinion that ICTOP can manage museology problems along with its main task, the training of personnel. Then, a little later, Professor Raymond Singleton from UK, made a serious and moderate statement, but even he in more or less the same direction, and first of all against the need for theory.

I was shocked, but calm and collected, and objecting that no serious arguments had been presented for discussion, informed the session that ICOFOM's task according to the decision on its establishment is to investigate the complex of philosophical and theoretical issues related to museums, and that we will do it systematically, by making inventories of opinions all over the world and analytical studies on it, to which activities we invite every body – including all members of ICTOP – who can and will contribute to the necessary clarification of the deeply confusing situation around the concept of the existing but not defined *terminus technicus* "museology". With Jan Cuypers' support, we quickly reached a cease-fire status with G-H Rivière, who at the end of meeting started calling me "mon jeune homme", and supported later on very efficiently the attempts to save ICOFOM. Prof Singleton reflected about our talk, and followed thoroughly the work of ICOFOM, which led finally about a year later to his announcement that he was converting to museology. A pleasant memory from the meeting that I keep vividly in mind is a picture of two Japanese gentlemen, correctly dressed in black suits, who approached me at the end of the fighting day, and doing an almost ritual obeisance expressed their admiration about my report and answers, and their interest to collaborate on the matter; one of them was Professor Soichiro Tsuruta, who became my close supporter in the struggle for museology and good friend until his recent death.

As to the phenomenon itself, I knew that voices could be heard, on all levels of ICOM, putting in question the necessity of ICOFOM and the usefulness of museology as our theoretical base. In my eyes – with my background – the worst in these attacks was their raw attempt to liquidate the Committee, firstly avoiding any scientific argumentation or open discussion on museology, and secondly paying no respect to the Committee's decisions on its programme, made in a democratic process by its membership. To accept the right of free thought and opinion, including views on museology, should be natural part of our reflexion about our task, as should be our right to refuse and to fight dictatorial methods. The Leicester experience encouraged me to proceed in this direction with my work in ICOFOM.

- The annual meeting in Torgiano, Italy, kept up the high standards of an intellectual exchange of ideas set in motion at the gathering in Poland. The theme of the symposium on *Sociological and ecological aspects in modern museum activities in the light of cooperation with other related institutions* took up issues of topical relevance in seven papers presented by eminent invited specialists, and published immediately after the meeting in the next volume of the Committee's prints made in Brno. Experts enriched the meeting with guiding an exceptional excursion programme. The participants, on the whole about 20-25 persons again,

were satisfied with the result of the Committee's work. The opinion was expressed, however, that measures should be taken, through an appropriate publicity drive, to encourage more museum people to make use of the Committee's professional activities.

- Instead of moving forward in this spirit, the crisis came in 1980-1982. At the Committee's Triennial meeting in conjunction with the ICOM General Conference and General Assembly in Mexico in 1980, three of the six promised lecturers and papers to the ICOFOM symposium on *Systematics and systems in museology* did not appear, and publication of the meeting documents could be carried out only thanks to the rescue action of ICOFOM's new journal. No meeting could be held in 1981 because the promise from Berlin-West failed, and it was impossible to find a new organiser or a place for it. The planned gathering in 1982 in Czechoslovakia was shown to be unrealistic for the reasons of Jan Jelínek's health.

These outward signs mirrored deeper causes: an identity crisis and a management crisis; a critical disproportion between the real conditions for the Committee's action and the needs to keep it ongoing. It was obviously necessary to find new ways and new methods of work. And it was necessary to convince museum workers of the need for theory – for museology, and of the usefulness of being an active member of ICOFOM.

Coming back to the situation of ICOFOM, failing interest for and failing support to ICOFOM and museology was a fact, but not all was hopeless. At the same time the first issue of the journal called *Museological Working Papers – MUWOP* came out in 1980, and a second issue was on the way for 1981 (published in 1982), both in collaboration between ICOFOM and the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, and with the help of Swedish funding. And there were still museology supporters interested in ICOFOM's continued activities.

When then in 1982, thanks – as already said at the beginning of this chapter – to the personal engagement of Georges-Henri Rivière assisted by the Committee's Secretary André Desvallées, and Gérard Turpin, appointed by Jan Jelínek as Secretary of the coming meeting, the necessary funds for an emergency ICOFOM meeting in Paris were provided by the Direction des Musées de France, practical conditions were ensured for a resuscitation attempt. The ground was prepared to avert the crisis if we could manage it.

- Summing up ICOFOM's early phase, the story of the Committee resembles in many ways that of other similar bodies: Started by a small enthusiastic group they soon face difficulties and often come into a crisis from which either they emerge or they disappear.

The museology committee functioned at first as most ICOM international committees do: one meeting a year with presentations at a symposium of some lectures on a selected theme and by selected lecturers, with excursions, were the required *pensum*. By publishing immediately after the meeting the symposium papers and conclusions in separate volumes, the forerunners of ICOFOM Study

Series – two in all during the years 1978-1980 – furthermore by starting a scientific journal, and by distributing printed minutes from the meetings, it already did more than was usual. However, when its action was interrupted after the Mexico meeting in July 1980 and until September 1982, it could not avoid a crisis. But on the other hand it also did manage to find enough strength and energy to create conditions for an attempt to overcome the obstacles on the way to the Committee's revival.

In the middle of 1982, it was still not possible to predict with absolute certainty what the result of such an attempt would be. For me, as chairperson of the symposium appointed by Jan Jelínek, the bad news on the situation concerning the symposium, which I received in August in Paris, led to desperate thoughts. At almost the same time came another piece of bad news: the first indication that Jan Jelínek intended to resign. This raised a new urgent issue to be discussed and decided upon at the meeting, whether I liked it or not. It was clear for me that the challenging task to lead the symposium became now a great responsibility with serious consequences depending on how the meeting would go. Conscious that all necessary effort must be taken to prepare a well-structured and organised meeting with an interesting programme, to ensure a choice of eminent speakers with qualified innovative papers for the planned symposium, and to draft a scenario for an open and democratic discussion on the issues of the Committee's aims and future work which should end in averting the crisis and in a clear decision about what will be done, I set to work.

In the short time of less than two months I made every effort to bring together the contributions to the symposium, and work out the meeting programme, in continuous contact with the Paris group, the authors collaborating with MUWOP, and all personal friends, and to convince as many ICOFOM members as possible to come to Paris.

4 *ICOFOM at the critical turning point from going under to revitalization, depending on what would happen at the emergency meeting in October 1982, and how it can all be put together in the few months between November 1982 and July 1983.*

At the ICOFOM Annual Meeting in Paris in October 1982, the Committee pulled itself together in resolute endeavour to overcome the crisis and revitalize its action. The collapse was averted for the moment, but more had to be done to avoid it forever.

Paris 1982

Decisive ICOFOM gathering, expected to put a stop to the ongoing disintegration, and to start a recovery of the Committee, and a revival of its action

Opened by Jean Favière, Chairman of ICOM France, and by the Assistant Secretary General of ICOM, Paulette Olcina, welcomed by Hubert Landais, Director of Musées de France and President of ICOM, and with Georges-Henri Rivière present, the meeting began well with a decidedly marked interest at a high ICOM level for ICOFOM and its continued work. About 30 participants, most of them from Europe, but also representatives from Canada, Mali, and Mexico, enjoyed what was finally a rich and a well-prepared programme. Through my personal, last minute phone contacts with the MUWOP Group, seven interesting papers were available at the symposium on the topic *The system of museology and interdisciplinarity*. Three other studies addressed *ecomuseums and ecomuseology*. Members and those present actively discussed the critical situation and its possible solutions at the annual meeting of the committee.

It was my duty to preside the meeting and lead it to a result ensuring recovery and revival. During the meeting, Jan Jelínek's formal resignation as Chairman for reasons of health was announced and I was appointed as Interim Chairman. The atmosphere was hopeful. Optimistic and enthusiastic ICOFOM members, attending the meeting and contributing to the symposium, declared themselves to be ready to support the program for a renewal action in 1982-1983, as sketched by me, and to assist in carrying it out. I remember some of the "older" ICOM members coming to me and expressing their satisfaction and confirming their continued participation in the work of ICOFOM. The faces of Rosario Carrillo, André Desvallées, Andreas Grote, Anja Tuulikki Huovinen, Alpha Omar Konaré, Felipe Lacouture, Manuela da Mota, Awraam Razgon, Janine Schotsmans, Gérard Turpin march past in my memory. And I still keep in mind a little group of "youngsters", with Peter van Mensch, Frans Schouten, Pieter Van Der Heijden, Tomislav Sola, Villy Toft Jensen and some others who surrounded me after the end of the meeting, and with the words "We like your program me, go on with it, we go along with you" encouraged me not to give up but to carry on.

It was a task with many stumbling blocks: the proposed teamwork had never been tested before, networks or channels for international collaboration were not established, an economic base did not exist. One thing was, however, clear: To carry out the rewarding programme was a *conditio sine qua non*. Declarations had to be turned into acts, if the revived involvement and retrieved confidence of the participating members would not be lost forever and the Committee remain a body petering away.

Having been honoured in Paris with the double-edged heavy task to lead the rewarding operation in 1982-83, I realized that the short time of nine months, from November 1982 to the Triennial meeting of ICOFOM and the General Conference of ICOM in London in July 1983, was still a very critical period for the Committee and that it would remain so until the London meeting had pronounced its final judgement: Thumbs down or up?

On the road to London 1983

*ICOFOM and its membership tested what they can endure,
how flexible they are and what they are able to achieve
when preparing and carrying out a complex international project*

According to our talks in Paris, the Triennial Meeting of ICOFOM in 1983 should be prepared in contact with the membership of ICOFOM, its Board and the British organizers of the General Conference of ICOM and of our meeting, too, and arranged in July 1983 in London.

On the agenda for London the most important documents to be discussed were concerned with the Committee's management and operations. The following proposals had to be drafted, circulated, commented and worked out as meeting recommendations: ICOFOM aims and policy, ICOFOM long-term programme, ICO FOM triennial programme 1983-1986, and Report on ICOFOM activities 1980-1982. An updating of the Rules of ICOFOM had to be proposed in the same way, too.

Regarding the main event of the ICOFOM gathering, a symposium on museological topics, it was decided in 1982 to arrange two symposia because of the two different directions at the Paris meeting – one museological-theoretical and the other ecomuseological. The one on *Methodology of museology and professional training*, should be a joint action with the ICOM International Committee for Training of Personnel dedicated to basic problems of museology. The other one, on *Museum–Territory–Society: New tendencies–New practices*, should bring together those interested in ecomuseums and new museology. The contributions should be collected in advance and presented in printed form for the respective session.

Moreover, the Committee should introduce itself, for the first time, on the international scene, and present its programmes and activities for the international museum community attending the General Conference of ICOM.

This was, of course, an agenda that exceeded all possibilities for a normal volunteer committee activity, which probably none of those who attended the Paris meeting and made the decisions had thought about. Since the very beginning of my editorial work with the professional journal *Museological Working Papers*, published by my museum, the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, together with ICOFOM, and since my participation on the Board of the Committee, it was clear for me that my seemingly very honourable function had a reverse side. I knew that there are often many who like to propose and decide, but very few, almost none, who are ready to find the funding and / or do the job. In spite of being conscious that it would be I who had to manage everything alone, I took the commitment as a challenge, just not to interrupt the atmosphere of common devotion to the cause of museology – and maybe also as a test of my own limitations as well as abilities. Having then managed it, I set up until the end of my following mandate as the Committee's real Chairman, an optimistically high target for all my ICOFOM actions.

Among the innovations used to manage the task of 1983, the Committee's pre-prints *ICOFOM Study Series (ISS)*, and its information bulletin *Museological News (MNs)* played a decisive role. In issues Nos 3-5 MNs communicated information to all ICOFOM members about the meeting and all activities, but was first of all a forum for a democratic discussion on all draft documents concerned with the Committee's policy, structure and programmes. As to the two symposia, the idea of ISS was born, and the first five issues came to the world. They were received by the participants with great appreciation, and became a permanent part of the ICOFOM working model.

5 *ICOFOM re-established in full power, stabilized and reinforced by the process of inner catharsis and clarification of its mission, decides to start from scratch a search for the foundations of museology in a worldwide action open to everybody who cares that a true memory of the past and our time, knowledge and experience, natural and cultural, be preserved for the benefit of generations to come.*

The year 1983 saw the Committee's intentions, aims, policy and programmes clarified, and contributed to a stabilisation of its internal relations, its work and its position in ICOM. No longer the struggle for the Committee's existence, but conscious systematic work to explore museology's substance and mission were now in the forefront.

The Committee's yearly meetings became the cornerstones of its activities with symposia on systematically chosen topics aiming at reaching step by step the final goal, the recognition of the foundations of museology. These activities, together with seminars on specific questions related to current problems in the museum field, lecture programmes on interesting projects or topics, and case studies on the state of the art of museology, museums and the cultural and natural heritage in different visited countries, including excursions and professional and social contact with museum people from all over the world, gave the participants a rich experience.

The other cornerstone, indispensable for the Committee's action, were ICOFOM's publications, its printed series. Even if the journal *Museological Working Papers* had to be put on hold for a time after two issues financed exclusively by Sweden, because the production costs were too high to find some other sponsors, the two other series – the pre-prints *ICOFOM Study Series (ISS)* and the bulletin – *Museological News (MNs)* – produced in a more modest but also more flexible way, have proved to have strong vitality. They became the Commit-

tee's platform for both scientific discussions and democratic reflexions on all important proposals concerned with the Committee's life and action. They made the participation in ICOFOM symposia possible "in spirit" for those who could not attend the meetings "in person". They also played an important role in informing the membership about actual programmes, activities and other internal news, and in holding it together. They are still published and nothing indicates that they should end.

London 1983

ICOFOM, stabilized and united around a common policy and programme sets up its strategies and plan of activities before a roaring start on its worldwide action

The 1983 Triennial meeting in London was a resounding success for the Committee. Both the joint "colloquium" with the International Committee for Training of Personnel (ICTOP) on *Methodology of museology and professional training*, and the symposium with eco-museological aspects on *Museum–Territory–Society: New tendencies–New practices*, arranged under the personal patronage of G-H Rivière, who now fully supported the Committee's action, aroused great interest. The distribution in advance of two volumes, and three additional complementary prints, with symposium papers and comments on them, was welcomed with warm recognition – at that time without realizing that the participants witnessed the birth of *ICOFOM Study Series*, as they were called after the meeting.

The general discussion on the Committee's matters, started by my presentation in *Museological News* No 3 of a *Critical analysis of ICOFOM activities with conclusions and proposals for future work*, called *ICOFOM Policy 1983*, and seconded by Villy Toft Jensen, Chairman of the Programming Working Group, contributed to clearing the house and creating new structures and mechanisms for work. The elections brought to the world a new Board and confirmed "*una voce*" my mandate to lead the Committee as its Chairman in 1983-1986. The position of the Committee was reinforced and it could go ahead with carrying out the agreed extensive programme in the framework of a newly reviewed and revised policy and mission.

This required, however, that an appropriate working model be developed, the material basis for the action ensured and that the interest of members to actively participate in fulfilling the programmes should be constant. It did not promise a bed of roses, it signalled hard work and sweat – but I took up the challenge when asked to lead ICOFOM and its action.

The renewed reputation and belief in energetic action led to an increased interest of museum people to join the Committee, and of different countries to arrange its *yearly meetings*. Moreover, with the recognition of its qualified expertise and experience, the Committee was later asked to prepare, in addition to its *symposia*, special *seminars* according to the expressed interest or needs of the arranging countries. Also very appreciated were *case studies*, prepared from 1984, at the request of the Committee, by the authorities, associations, museum orga-

nizations, museums and universities to inform ICOFOM membership about the state of the art of museums, museology and the cultural and natural heritage in the respective country. Their popularity was great because they very often made a debate possible among the local actors in the field, and, with the participation of our international expertise, an overview with suggestions for improvements and solutions could be reached, which otherwise might not have happened. Finally, special *lecture programmes* on interesting projects carried out by the Committee's members, but also other experts, were arranged at the meetings from 1985. *Excursions* were not only an enjoyment but also a useful element, linking theory with practical museum work.

Around the World 1983-1989

ICOFOM's international research programme, thoroughly documented in the Committee's pre-prints, rolls on at full speed

The list is long of places that hosted ICOFOM during my time as its Chairman from 1982-1989:

After the Triennial meeting in conjunction with the ICOM General Assembly and Conference in London in 1983 (ISS Nos 1-5), the first place was in Leiden, in the Netherlands, in October 1984 (ISS Nos 6-7). Peter van Mensch and the Museologische Reinwardt Academie stepped in for Québec, Canada, where the promise to receive the Committee that year at an ecomuseological session could not be fulfilled. The Leiden meeting, in touch with the famous Academie and Dutch support at all levels, was all the more appreciated. The symposium *Collecting today for tomorrow*, a joint session with ICTOP on the case study on *Dutch museum policies*, involving a lively discussion among the Dutch who were present – the first case study on the programme of ICOFOM – were the right actions to reinforce the Committee with regard both to its membership and its outreach.

The meeting in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, in October 1985 (ISS Nos 8-9), proved the Committee's great flexibility in carrying out the symposium *Originals and substitutes in museums*, a case study and other joint activities. An important contribution to the reflections at the symposium was the panel discussion among invited directors and collaborators of famous world museums showing casts and copies in their exhibitions. Another specific input were contributions of managers of certain respected museum shops. Mme Simone Besques, Conservateur en chef honoraire from the Musée des monuments français, who actively participated, was inspired to develop the topic further and arranged a big symposium in Paris in 1986 on *Casts/Le moulage*, where I was invited to introduce the section *Casts as substitutes in museums*.

In October 1986, the year of next General Assembly and Conference of ICOM, we all met in Buenos Aires, Argentina (ISS Nos 10-11). Here, the Committee's symposium on the timely topic of *Museology and identity* attracted a large attendance, as did the case study to which museum people from all the States of Latin America and the Caribbean were invited. The surprise, rather shock, was

enormous, when, next to myself as Chair, representatives from fourteen States took place on the panel and informed the public – and often each other for the first time – about their activities in the field of museums, museology and the heritage.

A meeting, outside of the programme but of major importance for ICOFOM's continued work, and for museology itself, took place in May 1986 in Alt Schwerin and Berlin, in the German Democratic Republic. Thanks to the understanding of the organizers and the support they received from their authorities, we could bring together fifteen experts from all over the world to conclude an important phase in our work started by the discussion in the first issue of MUWOP: *Museology – science or just practical museum work?* All of them filled very demanding conditions, having studied and analyzed in advance about seventy different contributions representing opinions from all continents, from which they had to draw their conclusions on the substance of museology judged on the basis of criteria for science as stated by theories on what constitutes science. They came with the requested 1-2 page statements each, and in four working groups carried out their evaluation. The work was concluded then at our closing meeting and written down by Peter van Mensch in the final report.

As the Committee's follow-up of this evaluation, its regular meeting in September 1987 in Helsinki–Espoo, in Finland, and in Stockholm, Sweden (ISS Nos 12-13), took up the topic *Museology and museums*. Here, the Committee concluded its position to wards museology as scientific discipline. Moreover, valuable information was obtained from the case studies in both countries. Two seminars, prepared by the Committee members at the request of Finland – *The need for museology* – and of Sweden – *National documentation centres – cornerstones of an international museum documentation network* – were ICOFOM's contribution to the reinforcement of museology in the respective countries.

At this meeting, the Vice-President of ICOM, Alpha Omar Konaré, participating as a member of the Committee, made an interesting confession for me, and museology too, at the final official reception in a personal conversation with the Vice-Director of the Central Board of Swedish Monuments and Sites: ". . . at first Vиноš was after me to look into this 'museology', and I asked myself 'who is this damned nuisance' [*qu'est-ce que c'est que cet emmerdeur*], but then I realized he was doing something very important". In 1982, when he was with us the first time, he seemed to be sceptical about our concern for theory, the symposium on *The system of museology and interdisciplinarity*, and our ability to reach our goals. During the five intervening years, he came to understand our resolve and the significance of theory and thinking in our work – and thus found the way to us, as did many others.

The year 1988 brought ICOFOM to India (ISS Nos 14-15). As corresponds to this country's enormous surface, we moved in November from Hyderabad to Varanasi and finally to New Delhi, met many colleagues and also ordinary people, which gave us a good background to the symposium on *Museology and develop-*

ing countries – help or manipulation? Many eminent museum people and university representatives from the country participated in the case study on Indian museums with a clear interest to work out, together with us, a document for museum improvement to be presented to the government.

In my last year as ICOFOM Chairman, in August 1989, we participated again at ICOM's General Assembly and Conference, convened at the Hague in the Netherlands (ISS No 16). The Committee held its symposium on *Forecasting – a museological tool? Museology and futurology*, but other interesting activities also took place: a seminar on *Museology and landscape preservation*, a joint session with the Conservation Committee on *Dynamic preservation*, and a case study on *Dutch neighbourhood museums*. An *Assessment of Achievements* during the years 1977-1989, published together with the seminar, a special session and a case study, in *Museological news* No 12, closed the first phase of ICOFOM life, and the period of my Chairmanship of it.

Afterwards I continued my editorship of ISS with volume No 17, comprising papers from the symposium in Livingstone-Mfuwe, Zambia, in October 1990, on *Museums and the environment*, and volume No 19, from the symposium in Vevey, Switzerland, in October 1991, on *The language of exhibitions*.

Speaking here first of all about *ICOFOM Study Series* during the years 1983-1991, we arrive at the point when the obligatory statistic figures have to illustrate the action in measurable units: The scientific activities at the Committee's symposia filled totally nineteen volumes of ISS (Nos 1-20, of which No 18 has not been published yet). Of this considerable production seventeen were volumes edited and published by me, one (No 19) edited by me and published by Martin Schärer, and finally one (No 20), comprising the follow-up of the 1991 symposium, was edited and published by M Schärer who will continue with responsibility for ISS. The eighteen volumes, where I was involved, number 3,092 pages, comprising 267 basic papers, 68 comments and 33 introductory papers or, mostly, summaries. This is a scientific production, with which, with all probability, no other international committee of ICOM can compete.

ICOFOM involved in discussions on its own and ICOM's policy and structure, and on museums' pluridisciplinary multifunctional action

Contributions to other activities at the Committee's meetings, taking up museological current matters in seminars, special sessions, lecture programmes and case studies, appeared since 1985 in the Committee's bulletin *Museological News*, beginning with No 8. Moreover, interesting papers sent to the Editor were also published there. In the previous issues, from No 1 and throughout No 8, and even today, the bulletin was a forum for presentation of and open discussion on proposals concerned with ICOFOM's constitutional matters – aims and policy, long-term and triennial programmes, rules. The bulletin played thus an important role in the recovery of the Committee from 1983, and in additional dissemination of experience and knowledge later on. Having been distributed free of charge to all members of the Committee – you remember that ICOFOM

counted more than one thousand members in 1989 – and also other collaborators, ICOM Committees etc, it was an important tool for ICOFOM publicity and marketing. In addition, it preserved, in a true museological way, as I can judge now when writing the Committee's history, the result of the work in common of the museological fraternity all over the world during that period.

ICOFOM also paid attention to all current discussions and happenings related to museums, the museum profession and its international organization, ICOM. ICOFOM focused on museological aspects of problems rising from confusion regarding the relation of theory to practice, including the need for theory in museum work, and from the very inflamed discussions on ecomuseums and new museology. The committee analysed the role of museology and museums in this process studied misunderstandings based on varying historical, geographic, ethnographic, cultural, economic, political and other conditions of different communities in the world, and on the accelerating development of human society followed by deep economic, social, political and cultural changes. ICOFOM sought solutions on how to tackle major obstacles in professional communication, nationally and internationally, caused by the lack of museological terminology and linguistic problems, among all others.

To illustrate how difficult it can be to convince sceptics of the logical – as one thinks – need for theory (i.e. museology) in museum work, herewith a story showing what can happen:

In 1985 I was invited by the Editor of *Museum*, the well-known periodical published by UNESCO, to participate in a meeting of the Editorial Board of this journal and present there a proposal for an issue of *Museum* devoted to museology. A pleasant and stimulating task for a museology promoter, I thought, and went to the session. To Paris and the House of UNESCO!

Unfortunately, the astrological constellations must have been very unfavourable that day. The Chairman of the meeting, by the way an old friend and eminent leading member of ICOM, when giving me the floor introduced the issue by stating that he finds it hard to understand why we, museum people who work with objects, should need a theory. Another honoured member of the Board feared that museology cannot be illustrated by attractive pictures which is what the readers of *Museum* are accustomed to finding in the periodical!

You can imagine how happy I felt about these encouraging remarks, "to the heart of the matter" so to say – especially after having heard in the previous discussions about a long line of topics to be taken up in *Museum* several years in advance. Nevertheless, with the *pro memoria in re* in hand, and published in *Museological News*, I entered the struggle. The situation was not especially hopeful until, quite unexpectedly, I received support from the President of the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). Noting that he recognizes the situation and the comments, which are the same he can hear in his branch, he gave an enthusiastic speech and apology on the need of theory in the field of heritage, including museums and their work.

The odds were changed – and the final score of the match mirrored the course of the game, sorry, session. We, ICOFOM, were promised, with no firm commitment, some fifteen pages in an issue to appear some years later, when our turn had come! What a cheering support to museology and to its Committee given by their own professional organization, and journal, I told myself and those sitting next to me, and returned home to Sweden from the big world.

Like most stories, even this one was surely forgotten by most participants at this historical meeting before they left the room – except me. For those who are interested, the *Proposal to the Editorial Advisory Board of Museum, UNESCO–Paris: Some reflexions on the need for presenting theoretical museological thinking to the readers of Museum, June 1985* can be found in *Museological News* No 8 (1985). The discussion around it, or a part of it, is now preserved in this paper as a piece of ICOFOM history.

Also another document, called *ICOFOM and ICOM. Proposal to the Advisory Committee of ICOM (AC) on the summary of the ideas, views and recommendations of the Working Groups of the AC on structure and policy of ICOM and on harmonization of its Statutes and Rules by Vinoš Sofka* is forever preserved in *Museological News* No 11 (1988). It is a testimony to ICOFOM's and its Chair man's involvement in the matters of ICOM, concerned with endeavours in the years 1983-1989 to carry out the democratization, decentralization, regionalization and professionalisation of the Organization through review and renewal of its Statutes.

Finally, all the acts regarding the history of ICOFOM can be found in *Museological News*, which appeared first 1983 as a simple information bulletin published by Georges-Henri Rivière (Nos 1-2), then in the yellow booklets given out by me (Nos 3-12, ca 1 100 pages) and afterwards in the information print made by my successor Peter van Mensch (1989-1993) and his successor Martin Schärer (since 1993).

Sometimes, one could hear: Too much paper, for what use? Now, when leafing through "my" yellow booklets, the colour of *Museological News* (Nos 3-12), from that time, I feel satisfied that I preserved our common history in black and white in them. Believe me, it is exciting reading about our common feats from the days of ICOFOM's feverish youth.

6 ICOFOM behind the scenes:

A peep in the Committee's kitchen on how the museological goulash that had been served to museum people in many local dishes often so substantially different that their common origin, if any, was beyond recognition, and in many cases useless and even unhealthy, was refined, extracting thoroughly its true museological essence, and enhancing its unique and delicious taste with museographical flourishes; and how the Committee had a chef and many cooks.

A lot has been already said here about the course of events around museology and museums, and the endeavours of ICOFOM, documented especially in ISS – but the ideas behind them, the reflections on how to ferret out truth on museology's essence in the most objective way possible, on its utility and applicability in the daily life of an extremely complex world with a complex human society, and in a likely complex museum institution, or heritage field, remained untouched until now, hidden from daylight.

Let us raise the curtain and look together – both those who were there when it started and remember the period of discovery, and those who came later or are completely new in our museological brotherhood and have thus no knowledge about the background of our work and the whole research process we carried out – what situation we found when we decided to lift the lid on the cauldron of museology goulash we had inherited:

Museology – the main concern of the Committee

The word *museology* was nothing new in the 1970s. Used frequently by the profession, related back to the 1880s, when the journal *Zeitschrift für Museologie und Antkwoitatenkunde* was published in Dresden, Germany, in which its Editor Dr J G Th Graesse presented the study *Die Museologie als Fach wissenschaft* in 1883. Museology did not, however, reach the stage, in spite of Graesse's optimism, of a generally accepted concept. It was refused by many, and recognized by others as practical museum work. Museology was also considered the art, or the field's philosophy and theory, in a limited circle by some thinkers and a few institutions, which dedicated their work to study and promote such a concept.

At the time of the establishment of the ICOM Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) by the ICOM General Conference in 1977, this uncertainty, and sometimes even aggression against the need for theory, led to avoiding the definition and speaking about *the branch of professional activity*.

Here are some pearls from the inquiry on *What is museology* made in 1975 by Villy Toft Jensen as given by their authors from different European countries. According to them "museology is" – i.e. at that time "was":

- an outline of the development of museums and museum work
- research into the present role of museums, their functions as public institutions with educational, research and archive functions
- research into the relation between the museum and the public, and research on the internal structure of the museum
- the purpose of museum activities within individual museums
- preparation of recommendations for classification and scientific documentation of museum objects
- probing the possible use of modern technical aids, such as computers, in museum work
- preparation of new and economical exhibition techniques
- arrangement of seminars in conservation and restoration
- preparation of experimental exhibitions in order to test the possibilities of the museum as an educational medium, and in order to examine the behaviour of the visitor
- why and for whom we are collecting, and which principles of selection are to be used
- the balancing of object - picture - data
- questions of nomenclature
- search systems
- the study of:
 - the basic purpose of museums (whatever their disciplinary specialities)
 - the role of the museum in the community
 - the 'common ground' in the functions of museums of all kinds

However important the technological aspects may be, it seems appropriate to draw special attention to fundamental problems with which museums are confronted today. In general these problems are not properly understood, but they directly influence the policy of museums in national as well as in international contexts as they are of essential importance. It seems to be the particular task of museological research to devote special attention to the elucidation of those fundamental problems and to come to a better understanding of their basic influence on the development of museum policy.

The same, complex and confused situation, appeared at the second meeting, the first working meeting of ICOFOM, in Poland 1978, when I, curious as a new member who wished and expected enlightenment put for the gathered world expertise the fatal question: What is museology?

When we started our activities in 1978, and during several years, we had no common concept of either museums or museology. Common professional language, terminology, recognized by the profession, did not exist, which limited real communication. We had to ask everybody contributing to our symposia to always give in the introduction their understanding of museology and to develop and present the terminology they used.

Even the 1983 inquiry on the same topic, organized by the museological department of the Moravian Museum in Brno, Czechoslovakia, and its director Zbyněk Z Stránský, at the occasion of 100 years' jubilee of publishing of Graesse's fundamental article, illustrated a still existing "struggle" between the anti-museologists and a now increased and stronger group of museology friendly museum people, among them several serious international researchers.

The point of departure for ICOFOM *in re* museology was thus more or less given: in order to be able to develop and adapt museology to changing contemporary conditions, to distribute knowledge on it and help to museological development, knowing what museology is requested that a broad international discussion should be open and the Committee should become the forum for it. Because of the uncertainty, and obvious tensions, it was necessary to start without any preconceived concepts: The arguments, based on criteria stated by the theory of science, should be decisive when solving the question that was the main topic of the new born journal *Museological Working papers: Museology – science or just practical museum work?* This and other measures were proposed in my contribution *Research in and on the Museum* to the Polish session, and published in the first volume of ICOFOM's scientific papers (before ISS).

ICOFOM – a group of volunteers

We were an international volunteer committee associated with ICOM, an international non-governmental organisation. In its framework we were in charge of research on museology.

As such, we had no firm base (only that of our Chair), no staff (only the officers or Board members living in different corners of the world), no facilities, equipment or material... and no money, with very little subvention from ICOM to live on. An international committee of ICOM depends on how its Chair "can manage it" through its own institution or country. This is something which is generally known and *in silentio* recognized as an unsolvable problem.

We were a little committee at the beginning of our action, but we increased enormously when carrying out it. It was enjoyable – but the increase of membership brought with it economic troubles. The more we were, the less money we had in proportion to it. ICOM's subventions are given only for an international committee's voting members, and these were not so many in ICOFOM. We were new and people joined us because of their interest without giving up their former voting membership in some other older ICOM committee. Not all our members were convinced museologists. Nor were all the really known big museologists members of the Committee.

We knew, of course of those researchers who, on their own, were occupied with theoretical reflections in our fields, and we were informed about the few national research institutions which developed museological study.

Having been bound to be a body concerned with the theoretical aspects, and respecting other committees' responsibilities, we could not go in their field just

to "do practical oriented activities", as was requested from time to time, and especially in the first years after our creation, by those who denied the need for theory in museum work.

This seems not to be any problem now, but was a real nightmare at our coming to the world, when many would skip museology, the theory, and with it the Committee without any discussion.

We stated openly that we, and all the others in the field, use the word museology frequently, but have no common concept of it. We simply did not know what museology is, and decided to find it out. All this seems now, when put on paper line by line, very logical and simple, but this was not the case when we met the first time and started our reflections. The museology question was a very inflamed problem, putting feelings in motion.

And ICOFOM Study Series came to be

The annual ICOFOM symposia were the core of our search for the philosopher's stone of museology. When the first issues were prepared for the symposium in London in 1983, ISS became the working model to carry out the research in and on museology. All ICOFOM members, and non-members too, could participate through their papers, both "in spirit" and "in person".

The methodology was simple: a call for papers on a museological topic, selected according to a long-term cycle of questions identified by the Committee on the fundamentals of museology, was made a year in advance of the annual meeting and symposium via *Museological News*. An editorial "The topic and its framework" outlined the topic in its essential parts, which members could address as they chose. The deadline for receiving papers in Stockholm was set for three months before the meeting, which has never failed to take place.

The chairman, without any editorial encroachment, assembled all the papers received into an issue of ISS that was distributed at least two months before the date of the symposium, inviting comments on them. A following issue of ISS, for the same meeting and distributed one month before, published the comments, analyses of the papers when in good time, and late-coming basic papers.

Two to four analysers were assigned the task to study the working papers on one of the sub-topics, and were sent copies of them as soon as they came in. At the symposium they launched the sessions by presenting the analyses to the gathered participants who – armed with their copy of ISS, their opinions, concepts and visions – enriched and furthered the debate. The following years saw advances as the symposia addressed more issues. The Committee was on the road to finding the meaning of museology.

Having read the story of ISS, an ordinary, non-ICOFOM reader might become impressed, or interested, or both – or bored. But for those of us who lived it, this was an exciting time.