

Introduction to CIDOC

Dear participants,

The establishing of CIDOC-China, the organization for the documentation work in the Chinese Museums is a very important event and is a great stimulus for the document of the cultural heritage in China as well in the world as a whole. As the current Chairman of the ICOM-CIDOC I received the news with great enthusiasm and I am looking forward to a fruitful collaboration between CIDOC-China and ICOM CIDOC. My warmest congratulations to CIDOC-China!

Let me also use this opportunity to share some reflections about museum documentation and ICOM-CIDOC based on my 20 years of work with museum documentation.

CIDOC is one of the 6 largest committees of the 30 International Committees of ICOM. The number of members in CIDOC has been around 500 the last 10 years. However, documentation is what a large part of museum activities is about. Thus one may argue that CIDOC should have had thousands of members. Why isn't this so? One reason may be the generality of the term "documentation". On the one hand all museum curators claim they are some way documenting the collections of their museum and consequently everything is documentation. On the other hand documentation is considered to be just the information needed for collection management and consequently a less academic and perhaps a not so highly valued in specially the larger and academically oriented museums. The advent of the Internet and the current easy access to museum documentation has made the assumption of documentation as a kind of secondary assisting discipline in the museum fundamentally untrue. I will return to this later.

From the history of CIDOC, compiled by Andrew Roberts a former chairman of CIDOC, it is quite evident that CIDOC has mostly been engaged in the development of standards and methods for how to do practical documentation of artifacts and how to organize, store and present this information. Thus CIDOC's focus has always been closer to the specialized and technical meaning of the term "documentation" mentioned earlier.

In the recent years there have been an increasing numbers of initiatives to create web-based access to the collections of museums and other memory institutions. In Europe the prestigious European Union (EU) project EUROPEANA is an outstanding example. Unfortunately, most of these initiatives are based on the casual visitor's understanding of a museum, that is, the tidy displays of objects with their labels and explanatory texts in the exhibition halls. In reality the exhibitions represent only a fraction of the museum's collections. The success of an initiative like EUROPEANA depends on access to high quality referential information about and photos of all the objects in the museum collections. Such requirements are difficult to fulfill both due to the fact that most objects are not photographed and due to the sparse information in the (electronic) catalogue. The latter is usually a result of the purpose of the

catalogues as an aid just to find the correct objects in the museums' store rooms and often focus on information about form, weight, material. The users on the web expect information about the objects context, use, history et cetera and may be a little disappointed when they only get information about the objects form, weight and measurements. Therefore it is important for us to continue to develop methods and standards and implement them in a way that encourage and help the documentalists to supply important information for the public when the artifacts are catalogued.

To meet the expectations of the users one needs to combine the basic information about the museum objects with contextual information. The old reports, catalogues, photos and grey literature in general form the most important source of information about the museum collections and document the work of scholars in the field and at the museums. A diary tells part of the day to day story of an expedition. A report of an archaeological excavation will usually contain the archaeologist's interpretation of the site told as the story based on the finds structures excavated. In both cases the basic structure of the texts is a series of events connecting objects, places persons. Events, objects, places and persons mentioned in one text or record may be referred to ("co-referenced") in other texts or records, where the stories continue. Thus other, more complete stories emerge from complementary facts spread out over numerous primary sources. All cultural historical research starts with collecting these related pieces until the collected material covers the story the scholar is interested in revealing.

To be able to exploit the richness of all this information we need standards and methods enabling us to combine the scholarly work of curators and the practical everyday information needed for collection management. A major effort of CIDOC in this direction has been the development of ICOM-CIDOC's Conceptual Reference model (known as CIDOC-CRM). The CIDOC-CRM became a ISO standard in 2006 (ISO221127). The model is currently translated into Chinese and the result will be presented at ICOM 2010 in Shanghai. Since 2006 the CIDOC-CRM and IFLA's (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) library data model "Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records" (FRBR) has been harmonized. CIDOC-CRM and IFLA-FRBR can now be used as one joint core ontology for the library-museum sector. It is also very promising that important institutions like The Getty Research institute (USA) , The German Museum Association (Germany), The Collection Trust (UK), and ICOM-CIDOC have joined forces and produced the XML-based harvesting format LIDO (Lightweight Information Describing Objects). LIDO is build upon Getty's CDWALite, the German MUSEUMDAT, Collection Trust's SPECTRUM and CIDOC-CRM. It is also worth to mention that the CIDOC-CRM is suggested as the application profile for the museum sector in the EU's EUROPEANA. Thus it is evident that ICOM-CIDOC is considered to be a serious organization producing high quality solutions to connect cultural heritage information in the global information work.

In my opinion the most important task of ICOM-CIDOC is to continue the development of these integrated and integrating standards and to make it easy to understand recommendations for how to use these standards in the everyday practical documentation work in the museums. ICOM-CIDOC is looking forward to collaborate with CIDOC-China in these areas. I am convinced that the broad experience of the Chinese museum documentalist will be of great



value and support for the continued development of standards and other practical solutions in museum documentation.

Let me finally once more express my warmest congratulations to CIDOC-China and wish you a successful conference and future work. I am personally looking forward to the Shanghai ICOM 2010 conference and to learn more about Chinese museum documentation work.

My warmest regards,

Dr. Christian-Emil Ore
CIDOC Chairman