Dear colleagues,

The year has flown by! Normally, it is the second year of the triennial cycle within which ICOM-CC holds their conferences, where working groups host their own interim meetings. For Preventive Conservation, we had decided against a separate interim meeting due to the dedicated IIC meeting in Turin on the subject at the end of 2018. Instead, we focused on making a contribution to ICOM General Conference in Kyoto in September 2019.

ICOM General Conference Kyoto

As planned, Preventive Conservation worked together with InterCOM (International Committee for Museum Management) on a joint session on ‘How far can we come with tradition? Doing more with less.’ We put out a call for papers at the beginning of the year, and ended up selecting papers in April. We had a lot of excellent submissions for our session, and it was particularly exciting to see that these submissions came from literally all parts of the world, making it a challenge to choose. We had planned a keynote speech, followed by two sessions of presentations and plenty of time for discussion.

Separately from this session, Preventive Conservation Working Group assistant coordinator Bart Ankersmit co-organised a session on storage and collections together with ICAMT (International Committee for Architecture and Museum Techniques), where he also contributed in form of a presentation. This session was of high interest and well attended, with plenty of interesting questions.

Overall then, Preventive Conservation, together with other ICOM-CC colleagues made a significant contribution to the ICOM General Conference. In fact, there have never been more ICOM-CC members attending a general conference than this year! You can read more about the general conference in the ICOM-CC On Board Newsletter (Vol 18).

Lastly, if you have never been to a General ICOM Conference, I can highly recommend it. It is truly inspiring to see so many museum professionals and discuss museum issues broader than conservation.

ICOM-CC Beijing

We are currently in the midst of making our final selections for the upcoming ICOM-CC conference in Beijing. We had a large number of submitted abstracts, out of which we selected just under 50% for submission of full papers. Together with my excellent team of assistant Working Group coordinators, we are currently working hard to make this final selection. I am particularly grateful for their input and engagement, as we cover a wide range of subject expertise amongst us, so we can hopefully come to a well-balanced choice and an interesting programme in Beijing in September 2020. I hope many of you can join us there!

Keeping in touch

Our Facebook page has come to unprecedented popularity, with frequent updates and lively content, not least thanks to Vesna Živković who has done an excellent job of breathing live into it. Don’t forget to contribute yourself so we can share information more immediately.

If there are any other subjects or points you would like to share with us, please get in touch. We also welcome potential contributions to this newsletter.

I wish all of you a happy and peaceful New Year 2020 and hope to see you in Beijing.

Dr Anna Bülow, Working Group Coordinator
RE-ORG: Moving forward with ICOM resolution no. 4

Since ICOM-CC was one of the five ICOM Committees to lead resolution no. 4 – "Measures to safeguard and enhance collections in storage throughout the world" – adopted by the 34th General Assembly of ICOM (Kyoto, Japan, 2019). The resolution was endorsed by 22 other national and international committees, and regional alliances. Gaining such strong support from ICOM membership is a true success for ICOM-CC, and a demonstration of our role and position within the museum community.

One of the key challenges for the over 55,000 museums in the world is to regain control of conditions in collections’ storage. It is worth remembering that most museums have 90% or more of their collections in storage and they keep growing!

A survey undertaken by ICCROM in 2011 confirmed that one in four museums have an incomplete documentation system, one in three museums are unclear about who is responsible for storage, one in four museums find it difficult to circulate in storage, and one in every two museums have insufficient storage units.

To address these issues and to help smaller institutions in particular, i.e., those with limited human, financial and technical resources, ICCROM developed a comprehensive method called RE-ORG. The method received the support of UNESCO and soon after, the scientific and technical collaboration of the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI).

The RE-ORG Method is a step-by-step approach to help museum teams and heritage professionals reorganize their storage rooms. It focuses on the creative yet safe use of existing resources. RE-ORG steps include: 1, a preparatory phase ("Getting started"); 2, a documentation phase of the current storage, collections, and their management ("Condition report"); 3, a planning phase ("Action plan"); and 4, an implementation phase – reorganizing the storage and improving conservation and access to the collections ("Implementation"). The RE-ORG method is rich in guidelines, forms and tools, all based on real situations and field tested in a variety of contexts. Everything is available for download free of charge on the ICCROM website.

Since 2011, a growing number of institutions and museums have adopted and adapted RE-ORG – more than 145 museums in over 30 countries to date! Many of them produced additional resources (85 videos on the RE-ORG YouTube channel, over 11,000 views, Collection Storage Tips & Tricks, etc.) and communicate actively on Facebook and other social media (over 1,700 RE-ORG Facebook members).

Soon national institutions like CCI, KIK-IRPA and CIK joined ICCROM in an international effort to build capacity for safeguarding and enhancing collections in storage. In 2019, CCI concluded a five year national RE-ORG strategy involving 23 institutions and 47 professionals. With the collaboration of the Museums Assistance Program (MAP, Canadian Heritage) CCI built further momentum, empowering museum teams to get MAP funding to upgrade their storage, to improve the preventive conservation of their collections and to raise collection awareness within their local communities.

In 2015, KIK-IRPA (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Belgium) launched its national strategy for RE-ORG, which to date has involved over 21 museums. As part of this strategy, two very successful seminars to share museums’ experience engaged over 350 participants, encouraging even more institutions to tackle their problems and join the RE-ORG network.

Stay tuned for more information on RE-ORG in 2020, and in particular for our next project: “SHARE-ORG – Discover Stories, Connect Communities!”. 
On its side, the Central Institute for Conservation, Belgrade (CIK) worked with national and regional ICOM Committees in Southeast Europe and organized national workshops in Albania, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Croatia. In December 2019, CIK initiated the RE-ORG Serbia national strategy.

It is worthy to note that these national strategies require a minimum of two years of preparation, the development of local partnerships, and the mobilization of financial and technical resources.

Besides CCI, KIK-IRPA, and CIK, in 2018-2019, more institutions have also succeeded to pull this all together and launch capacity building initiatives – in China, Chile, India, France, Madagascar, Nigeria, Portugal and now Spain (Catalonia) and Italy (Emilia Romagna), in collaboration with ICCROM. (For further information see the ICCROM website).

From our ICOM-CC international perspective, it is interesting to see how RE-ORG creates opportunities for collaboration and triggers actions which serve the larger community.

From March to May 2019, CCI partnered with KIK-IRPA, ICCROM, STASHc (Storage Techniques for Art, Science and History), the New London Maritime Museum, Connecticut, USA and the Science Museum of Minnesota to offer “Planning Your RE-ORG Project”, a six-part online course.

This initiative was possible thanks to the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (FAIC) and formed part of the Connecting to Collections Care Courses. More than 175 museum professionals from over 20 countries signed up to take the course.

Another example is the upcoming publication “Becoming a RE-ORG Coach: How to plan and lead a storage reorganization workshop”, an additional RE-ORG resource to assist future trainers worldwide and strengthen future capacity building. It is spearheaded by CCI in collaboration with KIK-IRPA and ICCROM. Stay tuned for more information on RE-ORG in 2020, and in particular for our next project: “SHARE-ORG – Discover Stories, Connect Communities!” It is a competition to promote the creative use of underused museum collections in storage, after they have undergone a reorganization project. Our objective is to stimulate innovation and empower museums to develop projects and activities that will use their collections in storage for the benefit of their publics.

In line with the ICOM mandate, the partners KIK-IRPA, ICOM-Belgium Flanders/Wallonia/Brussels, CIK, Diadrasis (a Greek cultural organization), ICCROM and CCI strongly believe that once made accessible, all those billions of objects in storage around the world become meaningful only when presented and shared with the communities they serve.