

## **Literary and Composers' Museums: A Definition for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Espais Escrits. Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català. Comissió Internacional  
Anna Aguiló, Teresa Macià, Mireia Munmany, Carme Torrents  
[info@espaisescrits.cat](mailto:info@espaisescrits.cat)

[Translated by Clyde Moneyhun]

*Keywords: Literary and Composers' Museums, museum, literary heritage, democracy, language, identity*

Knowing who we are and where we come from helps us to locate ourselves and to grow, on both individual and collective levels. Understanding and preserving the legacy of the artists who have gone before us is a social responsibility incumbent upon all of us.

For this reason we believe it is vital to have a shared definition of Literary and Composers' Museums, a definition that will help us to work toward the same goals; to create a network to develop and share objectives and methodologies; and, thus, to move forward in step with the world in which we actually live.

Espais Escrits: Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català (Written Spaces: A Coalition of Catalan Literary Heritage) is a non-profit association, based in Barcelona, that connects over a hundred literary centers and writers' museums from the Països Catalans (Catalan-speaking areas of Europe). From its beginnings in 2005, it has worked collaboratively to caretake and to promulgate Catalan literary heritage. Another goal of the organization is collaboration with other networks to promote the visibility of Catalan-language writers internationally (International Council of Museums [ICOM] and International Committee for Literary and Composers' Museums [ICOM], 2015).

This document proposes a definition of Literary and Composers' Museums that takes its point of departure from a new definition of a museum (ICOM, 2022). It goes on to explain the methodology used and the concepts that we have kept in mind while writing the proposal. It is worth noting that it was created and agreed upon by a coalition of directors of the variety of writers' museums that make up our organization.

## **1. Introduction**

A sense of identity helps us to grow as individuals and as a community. Historically, communities have shared a way of living in the world that is expressed across a particular culture (language, art, music, religion, technology, etc.), an inheritance that determines the dynamics of relations with other cultures.

Culture, constructed of material elements and intangible or symbolic elements, reinforces social cohesion and individual self-regard and allows us to imagine and project ourselves into the future. To identify, preserve, and communicate the unique singularities of a culture to a world ever more homogeneous is one of the crucial challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Literature and music are, surely, the artistic fields with the most power today to awaken symbolic values in us and to inspire memorializing impulses among writers, readers, interpreters, and listeners. The technological revolution and globalization are assets that we must learn to exploit for the benefit of the identities we construct and reconstruct endlessly.

Knowing the purpose of an institution or museum is key for correctly defining its mission and goals, and so we believe that it is crucial to have a definition of Literary and Composers' Museums.

## **2. The Museum Debate**

Museums, with a concept similar to the one we have today, were born at the advent of the contemporary state, such as the British Museum (1753) and the Louvre (1789), with the idea of demonstrating a public good to citizens: a collection of pieces to illuminate the greatness of those who display them to be admired.

The founding of ICOM (1946) responded to the need to preserve the legacy of peoples in a century as convulsed at the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, the

concept of a museum has been redefined to align with the evolution of the social mentality.

In 1951, the statutes of ICOM highlighted stability, the public interest, and the educational function of museums. In 1968, at the General Conference of Munich, the word “pleasure” appeared for the first time in the definition of a museum, and museums went from being temples of things to institutions that encouraged an open debate about what things they should display. In 1974, the definition of a museum included the idea that a museum should be at the service of society.

But not until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a fuller vision of heritage, was the concept of the intangible incorporated, at the General Conference of ICOM (2007). Within this framework, literary and composers' museums found their place. Still later, the functions of such facilities evolved and they became understood as places of democratization, inclusion, critical dialog, and accessibility (2019), with the aim of recognizing community participation and sustainability (2022).

### **3. What is Espais Escrits?**

Espais Escrits: Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català (Written Spaces: A Coalition of Catalan Literary Heritage) is a non-profit association, based in Barcelona,<sup>1</sup> that brings together the different houses and museums of Catalan-language writers located in the Països Catalans (Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, the South of France, Andorra, and Alghero in Sardinia), which are today distributed among various countries. It represents a community of 11 million speakers of Catalan with a literary tradition stretching back eight hundred years to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with the writing of Ramon Llull. Catalan literature has evolved since that time and has produced great literary figures, the legacy of whom is caretaken by over a hundred organizations associated with Espais Escrits along with the association itself.

From its beginnings in 2005, one of the goals of Espais Escrits is collaboration with other organizations and the promotion of the international visibility of its writers, leading it to join with ICOM and with ICLM in 2015. Since 2023 we have been part of a working group of ICLM that debates the definition of the Literary and Composers' Museum.

Benefitting from the opportunity to participate in the annual meeting of ICLM (2023), we offer the results of our reflections.

#### **4. Methodology**

The Espais Escrits organization works collaboratively within itself, and this is how we have worked to reflect on the proposed definition of Literary and Composers' Museums. The concepts we have taken into account and the draft proposal itself are the result of the work of a commission including representatives of the literary museums that comprise the association. The proposal brings together the general goals toward which the association works.

As members of ICOM we begin with the new definition of a museum approved by the General Extraordinary Assembly (Prague, 2022), and with the previous reflections of ICLM based on the definition approved by ICOM in Seoul (2004), as compiled by Stephan Bohman.

In addition, in order to develop the definition, we have kept in mind certain of the goals set out by the 2030 agenda:<sup>2</sup> Good health and well-being, High-quality education, Gender equality, Economic growth and Sustainability. If a cultural heritage, as a social construction, evolves and changes as a function of its context and the challenges that face society, we can not ignore them.

##### **4.1 Definitions**

###### **ICOM Definition:<sup>3</sup>**

*A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.*

A definition widely agreed upon and ratified by 92% of members.

###### **ICLM Definition:<sup>4</sup>**

*A Literary museum is an institution focusing on preserving literature as cultural heritage. Those institutions acquire, preserve and communicate this literature through museographical codes, in order to promote knowledge about literature and its role in society.*

*To understand this definition one must first discuss four key concepts: 1. Cultural heritage. 2. Literature. 3. Museum. 4. Institution*

*1. Cultural heritage can be defined as the special cultural expressions that are separated, preserved and mediated as a manifestation of ideologies and groups. It means that the identification of cultural heritage is always an ongoing process where groups in the society from time to time decides because of ideological, political and/or cultural reasons what to define as cultural heritage. Therefore, we can say that not all literature is cultural heritage, but all literature can be cultural heritage.*

*2. The Oxford dictionary definition says that literature corresponds to written works that are considered to have lasting importance. It can be books, articles etc. about particular subjects. It can also include booklets, leaflets and brochures that provide information. Some definitions also include oral material. The range of literary material a museum can acquire, preserve and communicate can be very broad. The decision of what literature shall be considered as "having a lasting importance" is also part of the cultural heritage process that museums are involved in.*

*3. A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicate and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM Museum definition adopted at the General Conference in Seoul, 2004).*

*4. Institution: What are the major categories among literary museums?*

*a) Writers museums. Often buildings/apartments where the writer was born, died or have lived during a while. It can also be buildings just dedicated to a*

*writer. A special kind of literary personal museum is when it is dedicated to a literary figure (for example Sherlock Holmes museum).*

*b) General literary museums. For example, museums about a geographical defined literature, a special genre of literature or about literature and written/spoken word in general. It can also include institutions with specially collections of books and manuscripts that are treated in a museological way (see above).*

*c) Literary landscapes. Like an "Eco-museum." Often the landscape of a writer or a landscape closely connected to the writer's work, where houses, nature etc. in a defined area are handled as cultural heritage.*

## **4.2 Goals for the 2030 agenda**

### **Good health and well-being (SDG 3)**

Music and language, both spoken and written, have been a source of well-being and pleasure since antiquity. The joy of imagining, of enjoying the sound of words or notes produced by a musical instrument or by the human voice, carries us to new worlds, created by individuals and shared with the community. Literature and music deliver to us knowledge and, at the same time, an escape, an emotional well-being that strengthens and empowers, that supports reflection and introspection.

### **High-quality education (SDG 4)**

The promotion of reading and listening to music is, in the educational environment, a basic tool to promote emotional growth. Educational centers and museums must work in a cooperative way to enhance the capacity to observe and listen, to receive and critically interpret artistic knowledge.

### **Gender equality (SDG 5)**

Museums must address the historic and systematic exclusion of the female gender and strive to valorize writers who for reasons of gender or other marginalization have gone unrecognized in classical historiography.

## **Honorable work and economic growth (SDG 8)**

We must valorize natural and cultural heritage as a tool for economic and social progress without falling into trivialization and overexploitation. Initiatives to protect and disseminate literary and musical heritage rooted in the land must be respectful of and committed to the preservation of the natural environment in which we live.

## **Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)**

ICOM included the term sustainability in the new definition of museums (Prague, 2022), where it is recognized that museums have the power to address and promote sustainability as centers where members of the community, researchers, and the public come together.

We find that the goals of the 2030 agenda lack the culture and necessary concepts for reflecting on the role of museums in 21<sup>st</sup> century society: Democracy, Identity/identities, Language/languages, and individual/collective memories.

### **Democracy**

The General Conference of ICOM (Kyoto, 2019) debated this definition: "Museums are democratizing spaces, inclusive and polyphonic, for critical dialog over pasts and futures," but the idea of democracy was not included in the definition approved later (Prague, 2022). Democratic culture must guide the function of all museums and therefore literary and composers' museums.

### **Identity/Identities**

The construction of a national identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a form of cohesion, but also a source of conflict when difference was not understood as a treasure, and rather homogeneity was sought. Today, with globalization, we have the challenge to respect and preserve the diversity of peoples and diverse cultural manifestations.

### **Language/Languages**

The origin of all languages is a cultural construction that is used to communicate, to interpret, and to be in the world. This creates narratives that respond to the collective imagination. Language, literature and music are elements to preserve because they are the expression of an identity, an imaginary, and a way of living.

### **Individual memory/Collective memory**

Individual memory of an author becomes communal at the moment that there is intellectual or social consensus to reclaim it. Literary and composers' museums locate the work in its historical context in order to show and disseminate its relevance.

### **5. Proposed Definition**

Knowing the purpose of an institution or museum is key for correctly defining its mission, as well as being conscious that this may change according to the evolving situations to which we must respond. For this reason, we believe that is essential to work toward a definition of Literary and Composers' Museums that takes into account the existing definitions (ICOM, ICLM) and also the great worldwide challenges facing us since the 2030 agenda.

Based on this previous work and on our own collective reflections, that we propose our own definition, a definition that we believe brings together indispensable elements for museums in general and specifically for Literary and Composers' Museums.

Literary and composers' museums are centers of democratic interpretation, not for profit, open to the public. They study, conserve and promote the tangible and intangible legacy of the authors they represent. With the same goals as the ICOM definition of museums, they must in particular evoke the work and life of one or more creators, connect them with the community (of readers and listeners) and establish a dialog that, in an effective and dynamic way, engenders a cultural and symbolic memory that expresses the collective identity of the community.

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Espais Escrits ([www.espaisescrits.cat](http://www.espaisescrits.cat), [www.mapalitearari.cat](http://www.mapalitearari.cat))



<sup>2</sup><https://sdgs.un.org/es/goals>

<sup>3</sup><https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition>

<sup>4</sup><https://iclm.mini.icom.museum/welcome-to-the-international-committee-for-literary-and-composers-museums-website/>

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Davallon, J. (2010). «The Game of Heritagization». In X. Roigé, & J. Frigolé (Eds.), *Constructing cultural and natural heritage: parks, museums and rural heritage*. Girona: Documenta Universitaria.

DDAA (2007). *Catalan Literatura, from a European Perspective*. Generalitat de Catalunya. Institut Ramon Llull.

Dovic, M. & Helgason, J. (2016) *National Poets Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub.

Espais Escrits. (2023). Espais Escrits. Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://www.espaisescrits.cat/ca>

Halbwachs, M. (1968). *La Mémoire collective*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Hendrix, H. (2012). *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory* (H. Hendrix (ed.)). Routledge; 1st edition (February 23, 2012).

Hendrix, H. (2019). «Framing the bones of Dante and Petrarch: Literary Cults and Scientific Discourses». In M. Dovic. & J. K. Helgason (Ed.), *Great Immortality*. Brill.

Herbert, D. (2001). «Literary places, tourism, and the heritage experience». *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(2), 312-333.

Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. O. (1992). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

ICLM (2019). ICOM International Committee for Literary and Composers' Museums. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://iclcm.mini.icom.museum/welcome-to-the-international-committee-for-literary-and-composers-museums-website/>

ICOM (2023). International Council of Museums. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

Lehmannová, Martina (2020). 224 Years of defining the museum. Consulted November 31, 2023, in [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020\\_ICOM-Czech-Republic\\_224-years-of-defining-the-museum.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020_ICOM-Czech-Republic_224-years-of-defining-the-museum.pdf)

Midoux, M. (2011). *Les Maisons d'écrivains en Ile-de-France : Patrimoine, Culture, Tourisme*. [Thesis]. Paris: Université Paris IV-Sorbonne Ufr de Géographie.

Mapa Literari Català. (2023). Espais Escrits. Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://www.mapaliterari.cat/ca>

Munmany Muntal, M. (2016). *Gestió del patrimoni literari català femení: conceptualització i proposta d'anàlisi*. [Thesis]. Universitat de Vic- Universitat Central de Catalunya.

Munmany Muntal, M. (2017). *La gestió del patrimoni literari. Conceptualització i anàlisi comparativa dels models català i anglès*. Tarragona: Publicacions Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Museu d'Història de Barcelona. (2023). Vil·la Joana: recerques, estudis i seu d'espais escrits. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://www.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/ca/els-sabers-del-muhba/muhba-butlleti-34/villa-joana-recerques-estudis-i-seu-despais-escrits>

Rosenthal, M. (2012). «Shakespeare's Birthplace at Stratford. Bardolatry Reconsidered». In H. Hendrix (Ed.), *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*. Routledge.

Santos Unamuno, E. (2018). La Literatura como Patrimonio: Del Nation Building al Nation Branding Literature as Heritage: From Nation Building to Nation Branding. 116-137. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328073165>

Smith, A. D. (2000). «Interpretacions de la identitat nacional». In M. Guibernau (Ed.), *Nacionalisme. Debats i dilemes per a un nou mil·lenni* (p. 119-142). Barcelona: Proa.

Torrents, C. (2007). «El patrimoni literari català i consum cultural». In R. Torrents, & F. Codina (Eds.), *Miscel·lània Ricard Torrents: Scientiae patriaeque impendere vitam* (pp 595-607). Vic : Eumo Editorial.

Uccella, F. R. (2014): *Manual de patrimonio literario. Espacios, casas-museo y rutas*. Gijón, Ediciones Trea.

United Nations (2023). The 17 goals. Consulted November 31, 2023, in <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

VISAT (2023). La revista digital de literatura i traducció