



Minutes VCM 1st Board of Trustees Meeting Virtual Collection of Masterpieces Tuesday November 4th, 2007 Manila, The National Museum of Philippines

Board members:

Present: Corazon Alvina, Chong Phil Choe, Steven Engelsman (VCM leader), Karl Magnusson (representing Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg) and Michael Ryan.

Absent: Inkyung Chang (Director of the Iron Museum, on behalf ICOM-ASPAC), Lejo Schenk, (Director of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam) and Jaeyeol Kim (Director of the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum).

Other participants: Manus Brinkman (VCM Content Editor), Jos Taekema (VCM project manager) and Julie Trébault (Liaison and innovation Officer for the VCM project).

Special invitees: Jean Anes (ASEF's Director of Cultural Exchange), Kenson Kwok (Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum) and Stéphane Martin (Chair of ASEMUS).

Regrets: Pitt Kuan Wah (Consultant advisor for the VCM).

1. Opening of the meeting, approval of the agenda

Steven Engelsman, chairman of the board meeting, welcomed the members and invitees. He announced also the following excused absences: Inkyung Chang, Lejo Schenk and Pitt Kuan Wah.

The first trustee's board meeting agenda was divided in six parts in order to cover the questions related to the consortium, the activities of the VCM in 2008, the financial report for this year, the VCM principles and the incoming activities for 2009. Due to the fact that all the trustees had received the reports several days before the meeting, the annual report of activities was discussed during the presentation of the version 3.0 of the VCM.

2. The consortium

A. The legal structure

The participants started the discussion by debating on the legal structure of the VCM. Until now, the VCM did not have a legal structure; it has been a project of ASEMUS supported by ASEF. Today, it seems necessary to transform the informal VCM structure into a legal entity, since sponsors do not want to deal with an informal structure: the sponsorship campaign has revealed the necessity to endow the VCM with a legal body. The sponsors need a legal structure to give money to the project that they could deduce fiscally.

Jean Anes (ASEF) suggested that the legal structure could be ASEF with respect to the requests of subvention. The VCM could use ASEF as a legal body to apply for grants and ASEF would refund straight away the VCM with the total amount of the sponsorship. The appropriate legal structure for the VCM could also be the Museum Volkenkunde which is the lead partner of the VCM.

The Consortium decided that the Museum Volkenkunde would be the legal structure of the VCM.

B. Confirmation of trustee's commitment to VCM

Michael Ryan, Karl Magnusson, Chong Phil Choe and Steven Engelsman confirmed their commitment for the coming next two years. Steven Engelsman had received the confirmation of the commitment of Inkyung Chang and Lejo Schenk before the meeting.

Since January 2008, the Asian Lead partner of the VCM, the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum has been very silent.

Steven Engelsman suggested contacting them again in order to convince the new director of the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum to renew his mandate as the Asian lead partner.

C. Extending the number of trustees

At the present time, the board of trustees is composed of seven members. There are three members from Asia and four members from Europe.

In the Memorandum of Understanding establishing a consortium of trustees of the VCM-project for 2007-2010, it is stated that the board of trustees shall serve for three years. The Gyeonggi Provincial Museum is acted as the Asian lead partner in the board of trustees and the Museum Volkenkunde is acted as the European lead partner.

After a thorough discussion, the trustees recalled that one of the consortium's main tasks is to maintain direct links with the Executive Committee of ASEMUS and to seek its advice and feedback whenever relevant.

The Consortium decided to keep the consortium as it is now and to let it open to new trustees.

D. Memorandum of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding was accepted by all the trustees. It will be redrafted only if the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum is not the Asian lead partner anymore.

3. The activities report for 2008

Julie Trébault presented the version 3.0 of the VCM to the trustees. They were very proud of the improvements of the new version of the VCM. Furthermore, Michael Ryan proposed to add a search engine optimization to the VCM to obtain a best referencing of the VCM in the search engine. Search engine optimization is indeed the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via "natural" search results. Usually, the earlier a site is presented in the search results or the higher it "ranks", the more searchers will visit that site. Search engine optimization can also target different kinds of search, including image search, etc.

The Consortium decided to improve the referencing of the VCM through search engine optimization.

4. The financial report for 2008

All the trustees have paid their contribution for the VCM this year except the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum and the National Museum in Philippines. Corazon Alvina explained that she has had a problem this year with the government of the Philippine which funds several projects including the VCM. She hopes to find a private financing for the VCM. She also assured the trustees of her intention to stay member of the consortium. Jos Taekema mentioned that the expected deficit (7839,75 euro) is guaranteed by the consortium leader, the Museum Volkenkunde.

5. The new campaigns

Manus Brinkman presented the outcomes and the issues of the campaign in China, Mongolia and India.

A. The Chinese campaign

As stated in the annual report of activities, Manus Brinkman recalled the aim of the Chinese campaign to the trustees. Twenty new Chinese museums should be added in the first place, and a momentum at the ICOM General Conference in Shanghai in 2010 should be created to add more participants. Funding for the China participation campaign has recently been guaranteed by Museum Volkenkunde and the process has been put into action. To achieve our goals, we need the cooperation of the Chinese Museology Society and ICOM China.

Several letters explaining the mission of VCM and the aim of the Chinese campaign have been sent to Mr. Cai Wu (Ministry of Culture in Beijing), Mr. Shan Jixiang (Director of State Administration of Cultural Heritage) and Mr. Zhang Wenbin (Chairman ICOM China).

The assistance of Mr. Zhou Yanqun (Shanghai Museum), Mr. An Laishun (ICOM China) and Mr. Li Xiangyi (ICOM Executive) have been requested.

Michael Ryan confirmed to the trustees that he will ask Tom Hardiman whether he could contact his Chinese counterpart Mr. Lu Yongshou. Steven Engelsman requested that Mr. Yonghsou brings the letters to the attention of Cai Wu and Shan Jixiang and makes them invite Manus and himself to Beijing to present our case. Michael Ryan mentioned that Shane McCausland (McCausland, Curator of the East Asian Collections) is totally available to come in China with Steven Engelsman and Manus Brinkman as a translator.

Kenson Kwok mentioned that he has several contacts in China at the governors of Chinese provinces level (at least two provinces). He will share these contacts with Manus Brinkman. Jean Anes advised the VCM team to try again at the ICOM level.

The Consortium have decided to follow these two strategies: the official and the unofficial.

B. The Mongolia Campaign

A proposal to help Mongolian Museums with adding masterpieces to the VCM and investigate the possibilities to add intangible heritage in the form of video presentations has been made, but so far funding has not been found.

The Consortium have decided therefore to keep the Mongolia project on hold.

C. The Japanese campaign

Manus Brinkman indicated that participation of Japanese museums will be sought by cooperating with the Japanese National Institute of Informatics (NII), which runs a database of objects from many Japanese museums, but only in Japanese. Although the NII had showed much interest in VCM cooperation during a visit of Steven Engelsman and Manus Brinkman to Japan, the follow-up has not been very positive. Although we had translated all our correspondence into Japanese, the response has been disappointing.

Assistance from the two participating Japanese museums to add more Japanese museums has not produced any result either. Karl Magnusson recalled that the ASEMUS travelling exhibition “*Self and Other*” is now shown at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. Brian Durrans, British Museum consultant and curator of this exhibition could be a “resource” person for this Japanese campaign.

The Consortium decided to share with Manus Brinkman all their Japanese contacts and advised that the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (Minpaku) is an avenue worth exploring.

D. The Indian campaign

Manus Brinkman indicated that a detailed strategy for India needs to be developed. He mentioned that various contacts by e-mail and telephone did not result in any useful communication so far. Efforts made by the ASEF-office to invite (and pay for) Indian participants to the VCM-Launch meeting in Gyeonggi in September 2007 were to no avail. Presently Manus Brinkman is trying to involve VCM participants with contacts in India. However the involvement of various VCM participants did not lead to positive results. Without exception they indicated that it is very difficult to establish working contacts with Indian museums. India is yet another challenge.

Manus Brinkman recalled that it is necessary to renew our involvement to add participants. In 2006 some VCM participants had made a promise to contact at least three other museums. This had worked relatively well and Manus Brinkman had been able to establish a good working contact with those museums once the right person had been personally contacted by one of the VCM participants. Manus Brinkman proposed to launch such an action again and asked actual participants to contact at least three museums during the next year.

The Consortium agreed with this strategy and confirmed their entire support to these campaigns.

6. VCM principles

A. The content of the VCM

The trustees confirmed the limitation of the content to Asian collections: the VCM is intrinsically a network of Asian and European museums. Then, it is logical to keep it as a virtual museum of Asian culture.

B. The opening up of VCM for non-ASEM countries (Iran, Russia and Uzbekistan)

Today, the VCM is open exclusively to museums from ASEF member countries but the construction of the consortium enables the VCM to open the network to non-ASEM countries. At ICOM's General Conference, museums from non-ASEF Asian countries had asked to be allowed to participate to the VCM.

The idea is that VCM needs to remain closely connected with ASEF, but should also explore a more open, global and inclusive approach aimed at all Asian countries and European countries who are not EU members.

Steven Engelsman raised this issue, also on the special request of Ms. In Kyung Chang, director of the Iron Museum in Korea and the Chairperson of ICOM ASPAC, at the ASEMUS Board meeting in Singapore in April 2008.

The representatives from ASEF stressed their obligations towards a member states-only approach. They would however not object to limited participation in the VCM by institutions from non-member countries. Jean Anes recalled that it is a very sensible issue for ASEF to add in an ASEF/ASEMUS project non-ASEM countries.

It could be a serious politic difficulty to host these countries in the VCM. Manus Brinkman suggested that the VCM could host the non-ASEM countries as a special guest member.

After a thorough discussion, the Consortium decided to respect the strict link with ASEMUS and ASEF/ASEM, so museums from non-ASEM countries can not be regular VCM contributors. However, the Consortium decided to open up the possibility of inviting museums from non-ASEM countries to be guest-contributors. They will be identified as such in the list of participating museums. Their contributions will be fully incorporated into the VCM database.

C. Increasing the number of masterpieces per museum

Some participants wanted to add more masterpieces on the website. Michael Ryan advised to create a confidential priority view where the rules of the VCM will be clearly defined and the maximum number of masterpieces specified.

The trustees were not against the idea to increase the number of masterpieces per museum, but it should be done in a controlled way.

7. Conversation among trustees about the further development of VCM and pertinent conclusions pertinent to the action plan 2009

Many suggestions have been made for the extension of VCM. The possibilities and requirements for these future developments were explored.

The trustees focused the debate on the sponsorship campaign and the development of a learning zone. They agreed to recognize that the VCM is an attractive project for sponsoring and project

funding; any extension and development of the VCM into a more elaborate virtual museum of the ASEM countries seems to have a fine appeal for one-time financial support.

The VCM has also to be expanded with new contents. The idea is to create educational website tools, e.g. a learning zone with lesson plans. The Learning Zone was indeed identified as a priority feature to add to the VCM but the development of these programmes has proved to be quite complicated up till now. The contributing museums have not participated actively in this expansion so far.

Without their contributions, this would be a useless operation, so it needs to be planned and communicated carefully. Manus Brinkman proposed to contact the education team in the Victoria and Albert Museum. They offer indeed a range of dynamic programmes and resources to school students, teachers and lecturers on their website:

http://www.vam.ac.uk/school_stdnts/index.html

The Consortium decided to put the creation of a VCM learning zone as the main action for 2009 (cf. Action plan 2009).

8. Next meeting

The next meeting of the trustees is planned to take place online via a videoconference in 2009. Another option would be to organize the board of trustees at the same time as the next Excom meeting planned in the Musée du quai Branly in fall 2009.

Leiden 2008-12-15

Julie Trébault

Liaison and innovation officer for VCM