

# IACM Newsletter 2023





In 2023 fortunately we were again able to organise a conference with nine members attending with one or more delegates, three online participants, three participants by proxy and the museum of the United States participating as guest.

The conference started on Wednesday 27 September. Participants arrived in the afternoon to look at the new exhibits in the Dutch Tax & Customs Museum. In the evening a buffet dinner started with speeches from Frans Fox, director of the Dutch Tax & Customs Museum, Nanette van Schelven, general director of the Dutch Customs Organisation and Janne Nokki, president of the IACM.

On Thursday 28 September 2023 the General Assembly was held. (The minutes were sent out to everybody on 27 November 2023.) The Museum of Customs in Ukraine was voted as new member of the Association. Also the IACM Statutes were revised.

2023 is a celebratory year, it is now 30 years ago that IACM was founded. Kim Sung-Jin of the National Tax Museum of the Republic of Korea offered to dedicate a 'corner' of their Metaverse to IACM to mark the occasion. This special Metaverse exhibition starts on 26 January 2024, International Customs Day.

After the GA we took a bus ride to the customs office at Rotterdam Harbour, where we had a tour of the Customs Training Centre and the container scan. Back in the museum Bob Murtagh from the National (US) Customs Museum Foundation explained the situation that our US museum colleagues are facing. The Customs Service was the first federal agency founded in 1789. The collection does not have its own exhibition building, but there have been several interesting exhibitions in different locations. The temporary expositions attracted considerable visitor numbers. The museum no longer belongs to the Treasury, it is now part of Homeland Security.

In the early evening we all went on a harbour cruise on the Maas and enjoyed dinner at the Royal Nautical Club the Maas, where Frans Fox told us more about the history of the club. Jean Pierre Reuter, longstanding member of IACM for Luxembourg, said his goodbyes with a speech. We thank Jean Pierre for all his endeavours, contributions and commitment.



**Friday the 29th we had presentations on the conference theme ‘Controversy’ by:**

## **1.Ukraine**

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**Priority of the protective or fiscal function? Historical perspective of customs institutions**

The Museum of Customs and the University of Customs and Finance work very closely together. Ukrainian customs has many partners in Europe and with a large amount of scientific, theoretical and practical evidence in the historical sphere.

The presentation is about the diverse functions of customs institutions. The main function now is the protective function, because of the Russian aggression.

## **2.Portugal**

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**Alfândega do Porto: from controversy to place of memory and national monument**

Alfândega do Porto started as small custom house in the 12th century, the building has been the centre of a lot of controversy in its historical existence till now. In aspects of war (go with the occupier or follow own path), location (protect dry or wet borders), finance (exceeding the initial budget), politics (representing a dictatorial regime) and commerce (private association in a public building). In July 2023 the building has been finally recognised as a National Monument.

## **3.China**

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**The Role of China Customs in the Protection of Cultural Relics**

The Customs Museum of China started in 2014, next year they will have their 10th year anniversary.

The museum has a diverse and valuable collection of all regions in China. Unfortunately, some cultural relics got lost. Between 1840 and 1949, millions of valuable cultural relics were scattered around the world. According to Unesco 1,64 million items were found in 200 museums in 47 countries.

The presentation explains how the Chinese customs work to get the relics back and how to prevent the loss of the relics. Smuggling overseas of cultural relics is the main cause of scattering. Since 2012 intergovernmental agreements have been signed with 20 countries to fight the smuggling. Besides the agreements, the customs focuses on modernization of its work processes and means.

## **4.The Netherlands**

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**Three controversial exhibitions**

The first exhibition is about an organisation established after World War II that seized all possessions of Germans and collaborators as compensation for war damages. Even the belongings of German jews who had fled their home country in the 1930s were confiscated.

The second exhibition is about the Dutch state opium factory in the East Indies. The treasury made a lot of money, by manufacturing and selling opium through government channels.

The third exhibition is about the “Toeslagen-affaire”. In the Netherlands people can get government supplements which led to fraud, chaos and scandal. So far the issue is still unresolved.

A visit to the Museum Boijmans Depot, a new museum concept of showing without context all that is in storage, concluded the conference.

## SPEECHES

Frans Fox, director of the Dutch Tax & Customs Museum

Welcome to the Tax & Customs Museum, the venue of the IACM conference for the next few days. The museum is housed in two former residences: the Mees family home and, on the other side, the house of the De Kuyper family. Built in 1910, this is the home of the distilling family of the same name that is still in business today and accounts for a good share of the excise duties paid to the Dutch treasury. What could be more appropriate as part of this museum?

We offer a warm welcome in today's cold world, with wars just around the corner and, after a year and a half, getting closer and closer. A world facing climate change with far-reaching consequences, where the news is dominated by natural disasters, causing so much human suffering, such as those in Morocco, Libya and – earlier this year – Turkey. And then there is the ethnic violence in Darfur, and people fleeing in search of a safe haven. That is the world of 2023, our world.

The Tax and Customs Museum was instituted by Professor Dr Van der Poel in 1937, just before World War II (1940). The building on the River Maas that housed the museum at the time was utterly destroyed, along with its collection. Five years of full-scale war left a desolate Europe with countless dead and displaced: that was 80 years ago...



But the war was followed by a period of hope, which was strengthened by idealists in a Europe that sought and found cooperation, starting in 1958. Their ideals could never come to fruition in peacetime up until 1945, but only through war and domination.

People like Simone Veil, Konrad Adenauer, Jean Monet, Sicco Mansholt and Paul-Henri Spaak sought a meeting of minds and cooperation for and in Europe. Seeking each other out and working together is what IACM members have been doing since its founding in Denmark/Copenhagen in 1993. Starting with a number of European countries, it has since grown, even outside Europe, to 20 members with close links to their governments. May the association continue to grow, even with members not directly connected to their government. We are an association that seeks collaboration with the following aim: The International Association of Tax and Customs Museums aims to preserve and maintain the rich heritage of Customs in a rapidly changing world. There in, lies our strength and our right to exist! Call it our ideal. Much is happening in the world of museums. Closer to home, we have seen our own museum steadily increase in size and professionalise since its reopening in 1949 (after war). That is not least down to the efforts of our Tax and Customs Administration. They provide the resources we need to work with a professional team.



We look for new challenges, a better experience and more social relevance in our presentations without attempting to sugar the pill. As well as Customs and state finance, we've been focusing on financial education since 2019: we aim to help children learn about the value of money in our GeldLab [Money Lab].

The Customs Experience that marked 425 years of Customs last year can be described as innovative, and our socially focused temporary exhibitions, such as Precious Goods [Dierbare Goederen] and Controversial Colonial Past [Belast Koloniaal Verleden], can sometimes make for uncomfortable viewing. We address tax and customs themes in a social context with our collection and stories and incorporate them into our educational activities and communications.

Let us continue to seek common ground! We make no claim to being a modern-day Sicco Mansholt or Jean Monet, but we do have our ideals and seek cooperation and are of service to society. After all, with our heritage and stories, we explain the past and consider the present.

I wish you all a pleasant stay in Rotterdam and an enjoyable meeting. May our togetherness ensure that the IACM continues to flourish and lead to even more cooperation and – above all – friendship.

I would now like to hand over to the Director-General of Customs, chair of the museum.

Please join me in a toast to the IACM and your endeavours.



# Openingswoord DG Douane, Nanette van Schelven

IACM conferentie Rotterdam, 28 september 2023

## Opening

As chairman of the board of the Dutch Customs and Tax museum, I also would like to welcome you all. It is good to see colleagues from around the world meet each other to talk about one common goal: telling the story of Customs and Taxes. This story begins with our history. Frans just made perfectly clear what the importance is of telling this history. This goes for the good chapters, but maybe more so for the dark chapters of our history.

## Taxed Colonial History

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A couple of years ago one could visit the exhibition 'Belast Koloniaal Verleden'; literally translated 'Taxed Colonial History'. In an intense way one is educated in the colonial taxsystem; with special attention going to the oppression, exploitation and slavery that came along with it. As soon as countries overseas were conquered, the first kinds of taxes were implemented. In so doing the Dutch state treasury was filled. This temporary exhibition isn't at display anymore, but the containments were largely included in the contemporary exhibition, luckily. In this way future generations can learn from this history. The story of Customs and Taxes goes beyond just history. It also tells the tale of the present. Also here the Customs and Tax Museums have a roll.

## Precious Goods

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To give you another example. Last year I had the honor of being guest conservator for the exhibition 'Precious Goods'. In this exhibition the importance of protecting flora and fauna is made perfectly clear. Also the essential role of the Customs is made clear to the visitor. In a confronting way one is shown how animals (bears, leopards or seahorses) are being worked up in furniture of other products; but also how sometimes animals are found alive in terrible circumstances. The visitor is facing a mirror and becomes aware of its own role in these criminal matters.

## The importance of Customs and Tax Museums

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I just told you two examples which emphasize the important role of Customs and Tax Museums all over the world. The role to explain sometimes difficult of confronting matters to a wide audience. The importance for these museums doesn't stop at the exhibition. It also applies for the museums itself. In this way I really appreciate the fact that the Dutch Customs and Tax Museum became a member of the platform 'Musea Bekennen Kleur', or Museum's True Colours. Via this platform museums promote diversity in their teams, boards and exhibitions.

## To conclude

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I conclude. Museums have to stand in the center of society and they have to be relevant. Particularly to achieve the common goal of the International Association of Customs/Taxations Museums: to preserve and maintain the rich heritage of customs in a world that is changing very rapidly.

I am pleased to wish you all a pleasant and unforgettable conference.





## Janne Nokki, IACM president

Dear Mrs. Director General, all our Dutch hosts,

We are so happy and grateful to be here, one of the most admirable and marvelous museums in our association. Thank you so much for providing our association the opportunity to meet here. We have had several conferences in the past in Rotterdam. It is a city, through which the flows of goods from different continents pass and meet. So do also ideas. This town is a global hinge that connects all these continents.

Thank you to Dutch Customs and Tax Administration, Frans, Anne-Marieke, and all the museum staff, for making the arrangements besides your day-to-day work.

This is now the 29th conference of the International Association of the Customs and Tax Museums. It is also our 30th anniversary year. Last year, the remnants of the Covid pandemic caused that the attendance in our 28th conference in Helsinki was not very high. Now, our association is clearly reviving. We have delegates from nine member museums.

We have also guests whom we've met before. Other members and guests will be joining us only electronically in tomorrow's conference.

Our cooperation is important and truly worthy to maintain. Thank you again to the Dutch Customs and Tax Administration for making this possible. This will be very important conference for our association. I hope that it will be very interesting too, and also fun!





## Jean Pierre Reuter

Our colleague and friend from the customs museum in Luxembourg is retiring from IACM and said goodbye with a speech:

DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address a few words to you. Today, I participate for the last time as an official member in this conference. Right now I am still a member of the Luxembourg Museum Committee, and if there is any need I will give a helping hand. Since 1993, when IACM was founded in Bordeaux, I had the chance to take part 27 (twenty seven) times, of which 3 (three) times in Luxembourg. During all this time, I met a lot of people, made many friends, visited plenty of museums, could exchange exhibition pieces, gained experiences from which the Luxembourg Museum could benefit. It was a great time!

Finally I wish to all of you and the IACM Committee all the best for the future. Maybe I will meet some of you in one or the other Museum. Goodbye and take care.

