

For a responsible delegation – Museums and Outsourcing

Monday 24th March 2025 - 6pm / 8.30pm (CET)

Auditorium Jacqueline Lichtenstein at Inp and on Digital platform

About the meeting

At the end of 2024, national media widely shared the strong concerns of some museum professionals regarding a perceived increase in the trend of outsourcing roles that are essential to the execution of our missions. Entrusting a segment of museum activities to a private actor is not entirely new, and service contracts signed by museums have become quite common in various fields, such as surveillance and reception, mediation, ticketing, artwork transportation, conservation-restoration, collection projects, management of shops and food outlets, exhibition displays and exhibition curatorship. These areas often touch upon the core missions of museums, including the most regulated ones.

How can we understand the questioning of this state of things, and what does it say about the context in which we are evolving? Is outsourcing a solution to address the increasingly urgent shortage of human resources allocated to our institutions? Has the accelerating specialization of roles and the emergence of new missions assigned to museums, alongside the internal skills deficit, become part of a skill-building plan? So, when the choice of outsourcing is made, is it a fallback option or a strategic decision?

The alternative is obviously artificially binary, but this question compels us to consider the issue of museums' responsibility and the delegation of that responsibility. Indeed, as Thomas Elie states in *L'Observatoire des politiques culturelles*, "the scope of what can be outsourced is variable", where should we set the bar? What can we delegate with full awareness and confidence, and what boundaries are we willing to establish, both in substance and methodology? What do we choose, on the other hand, to retain in-house, or even reinternalize?

The relationship with the museum's "employees", and thus the question of the definition of the "museum professional" and the nature of museum professions, the management of the museum's fundamentals, namely collections and relationships with the public, the establishment of different working methods and support procedures... these are all topics that demonstrate how delegation impacts our daily actions, challenges the obligations and commitments of museums, and leads us to rethink the balance of co-organization to manage it consciously and responsibly.

Emilie Girard, President of ICOM France, March 2025