

Professional Day 2024 ICOM France General meeting

THINKING THE MUSEUM OF TOMORROW *Exploring degrowth*

Friday 27 and Saturday 28 September 2024

Jean Falala multimedia library in Reims & Zoom

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Since the 1980s, the missions and activities of museums have expanded considerably. Driven by calls for cultural democratization and audience expansion, and based on the constant growth in the number of visitors, museum institutions have expanded and diversified their offerings, and strengthened their expertise by acquiring new know-how. The race for visitor numbers has led museums to offer 'blockbuster' programming, or at least to play the events card, with one event chasing another. The rise of digital technology has meant that new commitments have to be made, in order to comply with new channels of communication.

The return of visitors to museums in 2023 to levels prior to the health crisis could lead us to believe in the triumphant return of the "world before". However, increasing pressure on the resources allocated to cultural institutions, including museums, is leading to new operating methods: fewer exhibition projects, reductions in free admission, shorter opening hours and even, in some parts of the world, museum closures. Political instability and social tensions seem likely to have a lasting impact on the prioritization of resources, which are themselves affected by the structural rise in the cost of maintaining the same level of service, not to mention cyclical crises such as the energy crisis.

To arbitrate and to reduce: two increasingly strong obligations that also sound like a virtuous necessity in terms of today's ecological challenges. How, then, can we reconcile constraints on human and financial resources, reductions in the ecological impact of our actions, and improvements in the services we provide to the public? What are the risks inherent in this injunction? If we can't avoid it, how can we give meaning to degrowth?

Through subjects as fundamental as the relationship between museums and their collections, their audiences and their modes of management, the question of what is at the heart of the museum will be raised. What can we change? What are we fundamentally defending? In the final analysis, the subject of degrowth goes back to what makes the museum what it is, encouraging us to ask ourselves what we are not prepared to give up.

Georges Magnier, *Director of museums of the city of Reims*

Émilie Girard, *Chair of ICOM France*

June 2024