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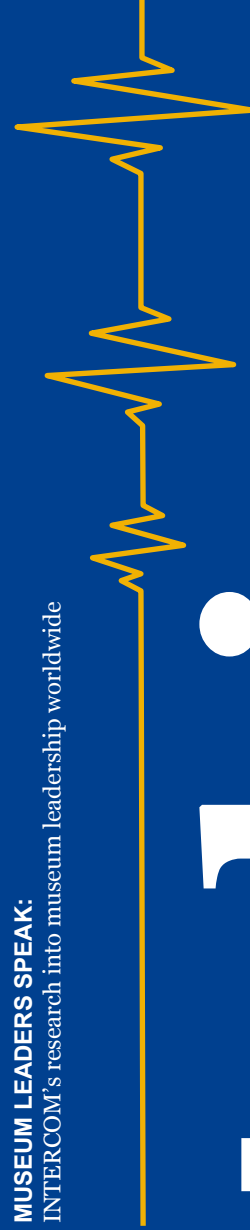
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TAKING THE PULSE 2021 // MUSEUM LEADERSHIP

MUSEUM LEADERS SPEAK:  
INTERCOM's research into museum leadership worldwide



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MUSEUM  
LEADERSHIP

# talking the pulse 2021



*At the core of every museum is leadership. No matter an institution's age, size, location, or discipline, its focus, tenor, and tone come from leadership.*

*Ackerson & Baldwin, 2019*

MUSEUM  
LEADERSHIP

# taking the pulse 2021

**Museum leaders speak:**  
INTERCOM's research into museum  
leadership worldwide

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Museum leaders speak: INTERCOM's research into museum leadership worldwide

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## INTERCOM'S FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP

After ICOM's General Conference in 2019 in Kyoto, Japan, the International Committee for Museum Management (INTERCOM) decided to initiate research projects that would re-establish the committee as a key stakeholder in pursuing good practice in museum governance and leadership. INTERCOM's mission defines the committee's interests in management practices, particularly stressing human and financial resources as well as reputation, which is closely connected to ICOM's Code of Ethics. Professional ethics are central to good leadership, and INTERCOM has started to create a review of relevant practices to inform its future work. In line with its main goal to pursue research in the realm of museum management, INTERCOM applied to ICOM to fund two projects: one focusing on museum leadership and the other on museum governance.

In May 2020, INTERCOM organised a training programme with the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and a conference with the ICOM South East Europe Alliance (ICOM SEE) with the objective to understand how museums are dealing with new challenges and how their leaders are building resilience in their institutions. This was the catalyst that brought

together a team of museum professionals to research the challenges facing museum leaders and their needs for support and capacity building. This report outlines this research and how it will inform the development of INTERCOM's Knowledge-Sharing Platform for Museum Leadership. This will become an online resource hub for museum leaders, providing networks, resources, capacity building and case studies on museum leadership.

This project's successive waves of surveys disclosed the immense vulnerability of museums directly connected with poor risk-management practice and unpreparedness of institutions to meet huge challenges. The surveys also revealed how museums had experienced difficulties even before the pandemic struck, indicating that existing models of running these cultural institutions potentially have serious shortcomings. In partnership with International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM), ICOM SEE, ICOM Czech Republic, ICOM Zambia and ICOM India, INTERCOM applied to ICOM's Solidarity Projects call for funding for a multi-year project to



Museum Directors forum, Zambia © ICOM ZAMBIA

establish guidelines, support and resources to assist museum leaders in overcoming difficulties and setting the course for the future. Several themes emerged from the research, as outlined in this report.

Although Covid-19 is still seen as a prime agent of change, other important issues have come to light. A new range of priorities has appeared on political and social agendas throughout the globe, which have dramatically altered the attitudes of relevant authorities. Change became a buzzword not only because of the global response to Covid-19 but also due to the need to address climate change, a new set of values among people or new ways of working enabled by technology. Two years ago, no one thought that working from home would become a predominant model for museums, institutions whose existence has long been linked with audience attendance. Not long ago, there were debates around whether we needed new technologies in museums, but when the pandemic struck, online engagement and digital content suddenly came into sharp focus, ranking as very high priorities according to ICOM's third report on the impact of Covid-19 on museums.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ICOM, 2021b, *Museums, museum professionals and Covid-19: third survey*, [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Museums-and-Covid-19\\_third-ICOM-report.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Museums-and-Covid-19_third-ICOM-report.pdf).



INTERCOM projects on the INTERCOM website © INTERCOM



The global environment for culture has changed, and fostering the resilience of our institutions has risen in importance, in parallel with the regeneration of our economies and societies. By highlighting the importance of leadership in building resilience, INTERCOM aims to support museum leaders in creating ‘a global solidarity model that will help many museums’.<sup>2</sup> The comprehensive survey sent to museum leaders across the globe was the first step taken by INTERCOM’s international research team, consisting of Lizzy Moriarty (United Kingdom), Marek Prokůpek (Czech Republic), Anne-Marie Gilis (Belgium) and Carol Ann Scott (United Kingdom), assisted by Hans van de Bunte (the Netherlands) and Goranka Horjan (Croatia). The team was supported by the project partners, the ICOM Secretariat and ICOM’s regional alliances and organisations. Their help in disseminating the survey to museum leaders worldwide is greatly appreciated.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, ICOM, also together with other organisations<sup>3</sup>, has conducted several surveys<sup>4</sup> on the impact on museums. This project on leadership not only establishes the context in which museum leaders are operating but also aims to provide solutions and support for them. The global crises have impacted leaders and decision makers in their everyday work, and this research aims to provide ICOM with a picture of where museum leaders stand in such a challenging environment and how to support them. The research will be an initial step in informing the development of a ‘Digital Leadership Knowledge Platform’ with culturally relevant leadership resources

<sup>2</sup> Project application.

<sup>3</sup> Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), 2020, *Survey on the impact of the COVID-19 situation on museums in Europe: Final Report*, May 2020, [https://www.nemo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/NEMO\\_documents/NEMO\\_COVID19\\_Report\\_12.05.2020.pdf](https://www.nemo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/NEMO_documents/NEMO_COVID19_Report_12.05.2020.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Three surveys have been made available on the ICOM website.

and models which will be applicable to the varied global, regional and cultural contexts in which museums operate’.<sup>5</sup> This platform, envisaged for the next phase of the project, will serve as a tool to support museum leaders in re-establishing smooth operations in their institutions and help them navigate the new circumstances of this prolonged pandemic, which has added additional weight to pre-existing challenges.



ICOM Kyoto 2019 conference opening ceremony © ICOM SEE

Museums need mature leadership to develop suitable strategies to overcome the consequences of multiple crises. How to establish trust and open dialogue between stakeholders is a key issue for any leader.

<sup>5</sup> Project application.

The majority of responses in INTERCOM's leadership survey and follow-up interviews have highlighted this point, as seen in the recommendations in this report, in which human resources have been identified as one of the most significant resources for dealing with crises. Therefore, INTERCOM proposes in this report various support mechanisms, including the development of a global museum leadership mentoring programme. This is in line with the role of ICOM as a global professional museum organisation whose members put their trust in networking and joining forces to focus the relevance of their museums on the emerging needs of society.



***Chair of INTERCOM  
Goranka Horjan***



## INTERCOM MUSEUM LEADERSHIP RESEARCH TEAM

**Goranka Horjan**, the chair of INTERCOM, has over 33 years of experience working in museums. Currently, she is the director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, Croatia. She is an art historian and museologist, with a PhD in information and communication sciences. Her focus is on museum development, infrastructural improvement and investments. She has led several museum investment projects in Croatia, including some funded by European Union. She supports international networking and is member of ICOM, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), NEMO, Europa Nostra and Interpret Europe.



**Carol Scott** is a strategist, researcher and evaluator who has published widely on museum value, impact and leadership. A member of the ICOM Executive Board since 2016, she has had key roles on the Strategic Planning Committee, the Internal Review, the Code of Conduct and the INTERCOM Leadership Project. She is the Chair of the Academic and Programming Board of the International Museum Research and Education Centre (ICOM-IMREC) and is founding director of Carol Scott Associates, a consultancy based in London, the United Kingdom.



**Hans van de Bunte** is a museum professional with a broad background. His expertise includes working as Director, Public Programs at the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam and continued in Southeast Asia where he successfully realised the new Sarawak Museum Complex in Kuching, Malaysia. Currently he shares his governance expertise as a board member of INTERCOM and in the Supervisory Board of DutchCulture, the national institute for International Culture Exchange. Hans is the founder of JJ Curation & Well-Being and works now as interim director of Museum De Voorde.



**Lizzy Moriarty** is a museum consultant who previously worked in international management at the British Museum and the Natural History Museum, both in London. Her work spans the planning and development of museums and cultural heritage institutions, developing training programmes in museum engagement internationally (principally in the Middle East and China) and the development of international strategies for a wide range of cultural organisations. Her clients include Wellcome Trust, Wellcome Collection, the Science Museum Group and Nottingham University. She is also a Non-Executive Director of Cultural Innovations.



**Marek Prokůpek** is currently an assistant professor at the Department of Arts Management at the University of Economics in Prague, where he teaches courses in arts and museum management, cultural economics and evaluation strategies in the cultural sector, art finance and the art market. His research interests lie in the area of business models for arts and cultural organisations, finance in the arts, fundraising and philanthropy in museums and its ethical aspects and dilemmas.



**Anne-Marie Gilis** is a creative business strategist who currently serves as an adjunct professor at the American University Dubai and as a lecturer at the Austrian business school Management Center Innsbruck, where she teaches leadership. Anne-Marie focuses on creative management, strategy, future-thinking and museum leadership. She is currently finishing a doctoral degree in cultural economics, in collaboration with Cultural Studies Digital (KU Leuven). She is a member of ICOM and holds an MSc in Management from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This global study of museum leadership, undertaken by INTERCOM, brings attention to global museum leadership. The project examines and highlights two main processes and one significant principle: **(i) leadership and change**, with a specific interest in leading in times of unprecedented crisis based on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; and **(ii) strategic leadership**. Its principle is **diversity**, as it covers multiple territories, multiple governance models, and a wide range of priorities. The purpose of this major study is to, for the first time ever, develop a *global* picture of museum leadership, to establish regional differences, to address the sector's most pressing questions and issues, and to define support for museum leaders based on evidence of need.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that museum leadership has received little attention so far.<sup>6</sup> Yet it is a field that has undergone – and is still undergoing – many changes, especially in an environment that is under

<sup>6</sup> K. Moore, ed., 1994, *Museum Management* (London: Routledge); C. Duncan, 1995, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge); S. Suchy, 2004, *Leading with Passion: Change Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> – Century Museum* (Plymouth: AltaMira); A. Alvinus, 2017, *Contemporary Leadership Challenges* (Rijeka: InTech); J. I. Johnson & P. D. Sobczak, 2021, 'Leadership and Leader Development: Perspectives from Museum and Academic Library Professionals,' *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 269–295.



School groups at the Lusaka National Museum, Lusaka, Zambia © ICOM ZAMBIA

constant tension with crises such as climate change, political strains and, most recently, the pandemic. Museums are at the heart of society; they should be able to pick up on the signals of all these challenges and respond quickly, especially in terms of their social engagement and societal voice. Alert, responsive leadership is the prerequisite for change and a more prominent social role for museums globally.<sup>7</sup>

According to what leadership experts call a ‘post-heroic model’, leadership is about change management, coordination and team building.<sup>8</sup> It involves a collective process between leaders and their followers, towards a shared purpose, associated with the articulation and development of a vision. For today’s museum leaders, that vision is usually based on the needs of the community and on the creation of an environment that promotes dialogue, understands the significance of history and that has the capacity and openness to educate, engage and empower audiences.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, an all-encompassing and updated understanding of how a museum leader achieves those objectives is still

<sup>7</sup> Johnson & Sobczak, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Suchy, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Ackerson & J. H. Baldwin, 2019, *Leadership Matters. Leading Museums in an Age of Discord* (London: Rowman & Littlefield).



The Moto Moto Museum, Mbala, Zambia © ICOM ZAMBIA

absent. Thus, when it comes to the specific qualities of a successful museum leader, there is unfortunately insufficient evidence of what the museum sector needs today to respond to the growing demand for deep engagement with the many social issues and an increasing need for financial stability. Hence, the importance of this research project.

This study reveals **five themes**.

## MUSEUM LEADERS’ CHALLENGES

Since the leadership crisis in museums in the 1990s,<sup>10</sup> there has been insufficient change. The same challenges remain with regard to sufficient autonomy; funding and the adoption of revenue-generating strategies; serving new audiences; and to museum governance, especially for the public institutions where the role of the government is often perceived as prevailing and where the function of museum leadership recedes from a leadership role to a managerial role. The survey results indicate that respondents have least autonomy in critical

<sup>10</sup> D. Tunney, 1997, ‘World’s friends meet amidst Mexico’s past,’ *LOOK March*, pp. 12–13; J. Abruzzo, 1991, ‘Forecast for the Nineties,’ *International Arts Manager*, pp. 41–43; Suchy, 2004.



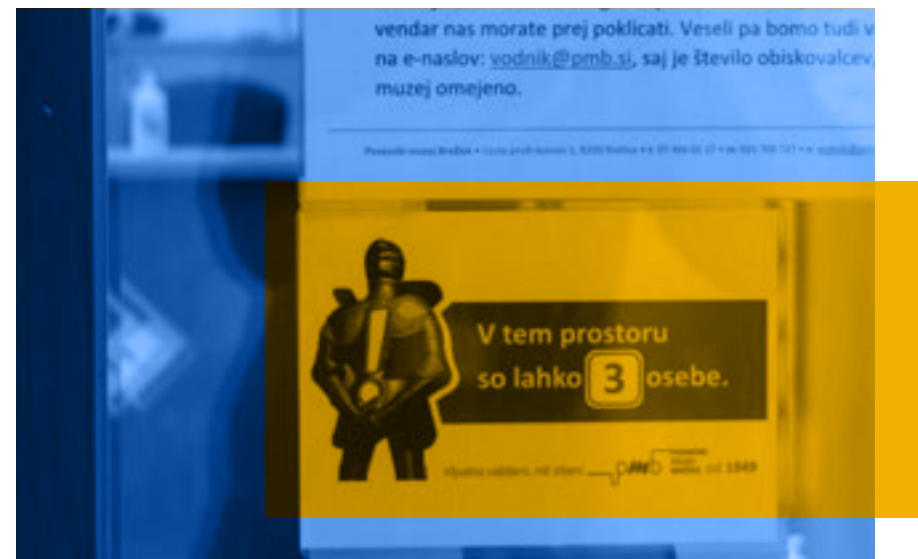
areas such as budgetary and financial changes, staff restructuring and human resources. Control of these resources is essential to enable effective leadership.

### MUSEUM LEADERS' SKILL SET

The role of the museum leader involves a complex set of tasks. A sharper definition of what museum leadership entails, clearly distinguishing between leadership and management and recognising those complex requirements (i.e. curatorial skills combined with having a vision, excellent people management and business skills, international connections) is crucial. For the past two decades, museum leadership has been as much about marketing, finances, change management and public relations as it is about collecting, exhibiting and the academic programme. The question that arises from this research is whether the position of museum director has grown sufficiently over the years, and whether this multifaceted role has received sufficient attention in the cultural policy and executive recruitment discourses.

### THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

In addition to rapid growth in the field of new technological applications in museums, the research into the impact of Covid-19 reveals some interesting cultural differences. In Africa, for example, the pandemic has awakened museums to the need for new business models and visionary leadership. In Asia and the Middle East, the crisis has placed particular emphasis on a reassessment of the museum's value. In Europe, Latin America and North America, a greater commitment has emerged to emphasise and potentially redefine the social role of museums. In Oceania, the pandemic has highlighted the need to develop new approaches to audience engagement. Overall, Covid-19 has emphasised the significance of both people management and innovative leadership skills in museums. The museum leader of tomorrow puts teams of people as well as the institution's strategic mission at the heart of their work.

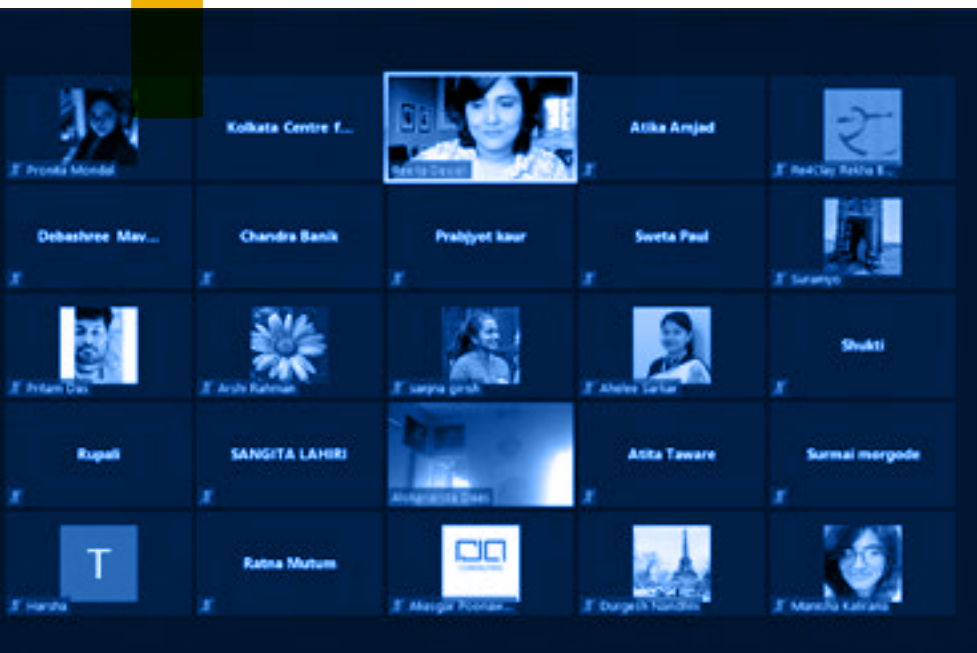


COVID-19 signage reassures visitors at the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia  
© ICOM SEE



## MUSEUM LEADERS' DEGREE OF AUTONOMY

The museum leaders who responded to the survey defined change as something that can be a useful and positive catalyst for the institution. However, the degree of change a museum leader can make often depends on the degree of autonomy they have. The regional comparison brings to light that museum leaders in Africa, Asia and Europe experience the least autonomy in their day-to-day practice. Accountability to boards of trustees or dependence on political stakeholders, especially for publicly funded institutions, was mentioned as an obstacle and potential impediment to change.



Online capacity building forums provide an opportunity to share skills, experience and ideas @ ICOM INDIA

## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR MUSEUM LEADERS

Finally, the results from this study accentuate the importance of human capital: a culture of shared values and empowered teams, together with the pivotal role of the adaptive museum leader who has excellent communication skills, is analytical, flexible and open to a diversity of tasks, from curating to public relations and fundraising. Today's museum leaders are increasingly mastering both academic and business practices. Previous academic research on museum leadership indicates that it takes at least 10 years to develop leadership potential.<sup>11</sup> This fact, together with the data analysis of this study, indicates that the most beneficial and necessary support for museum leaders includes mentorships and training, international support networks and the exchange of best practices via a global museum leaders platform, supported by ICOM.

<sup>11</sup> Suchy, 2004, p. 5.

## INTRODUCTION

For several years, museums have questioned their place in society, their relationship to the public, their educational role, their ability to ensure financial stability and, for some, their colonial narratives. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the challenges associated with these concerns. When we think about the future and, in this case, a future after today's pandemic, it is not only about restoring museums to full operation. The question that arises now more than ever is how the museum sector can continue to develop and grow by welcoming and applying new technologies, by approaching the public from an innovative point of view – and all this in the historical context of museums as organisations that collect, preserve and exhibit heritage and culture. It goes without saying that effective leadership is the common thread in this story of reconstruction.

One of INTERCOM's essential purposes is to anticipate emerging trends and their implications for global museum leadership. Therefore, the International Committee decided in late 2019, right before the Covid-19 outbreak, that it wanted to understand more about museum leadership and take the lead in future leadership support projects. The pandemic that followed was a confirmation of the necessity to



Mr Mudenda, Acting Director General of the Zambian National Museums  
Board greeting the former President of Zambia Dr. Lungu © ICOM ZAMBIA

define the support and guidance of museums through such complicated times. INTERCOM's consideration of **leadership as the essential dimension for museums' sustainability** is even more relevant now that the pandemic has placed a requirement for strong leadership and reinvention at the centre of its practice. INTERCOM launched the large-scale, international study outlined above to gain a deeper knowledge of museum leadership, its diversity on a global level, the factors that generate successful leadership and, finally, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the museum world.

This report presents the results of this first global leadership research project, which aims to support global museum leadership by means of creating a supportive future network of museum directors worldwide. The study, funded by ICOM's Solidarity Projects scheme through the Strategic Allocation Review Committee and implemented by its partners – ICOM Czech Republic, ICOM India, ICOM Zambia, ICOM Czech Republic, ICOM SEE and ICOFOM – involves more than one hundred countries and will be used as a foundation to develop a knowledge platform on museum leadership.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was preceded by a series of in-depth interviews with a selection of museum leaders around the world in order to formulate a list of meaningful survey questions. The research was conducted in three waves of both quantitative and qualitative surveys, between November 2020 and May 2021. It was an iterative process whereby the learning and results from each wave were tested, revised and applied to the next wave's framework.

For the quantitative phase, there was an online survey, which consisted of 36 questions – 29 closed and seven open questions – on museum leadership and on leading in times of crisis. The survey was presented in seven languages – English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese and Russian – and was distributed via ICOM channels. International Committees, Regional Committees and National Committees, between February and May 2021, helped to distribute the survey among their colleagues.

INTERCOM's global leadership survey was structured around **two main research questions**:

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What does global museum leadership look like, and how does it differ by country or region?

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What support do museum leaders need in times of crisis? And how do museum leaders think that the pandemic has impacted museums?

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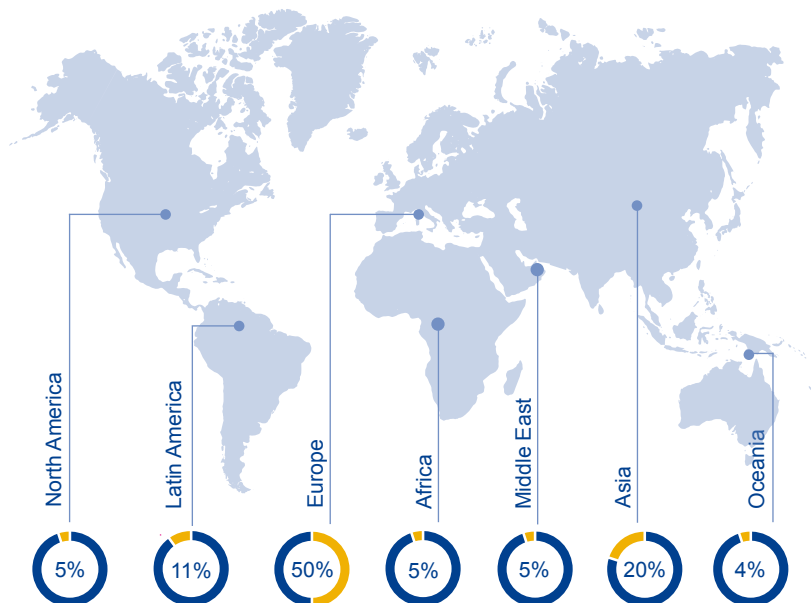
Based on thorough data analysis of the survey results through statistical analysis software, (SurveyMonkey, Stata and SPSS), INTERCOM's team of researchers revisited the survey data and connected them with three

globally emerging themes: (1) the impact of Covid-19, (2) autonomy and (3) professional development for existing museum leaders. For this final wave, a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions on these three themes was presented to 14 museum directors – one public and one private institution for each of the seven global regions – to verify the survey results.

## PARTICIPANTS

In total, there were 903 participants: directors, associate directors or department heads of museums from 109 countries across seven regions. Half of the participants were from Europe, followed by Asia (20 per cent), Latin America (11 per cent), North America (5 per cent), the Middle East (5 per cent), Africa (5 per cent) and Oceania (4 per cent). The distribution of the respondents by gender tilts slightly towards more women with a male/female ratio of 40/58.

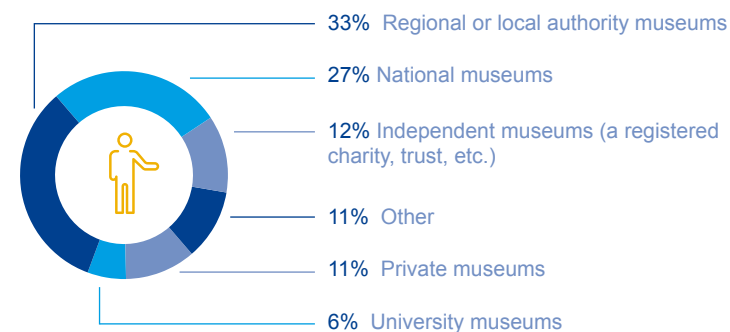
FIGURE 1: GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF RESPONDENTS



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

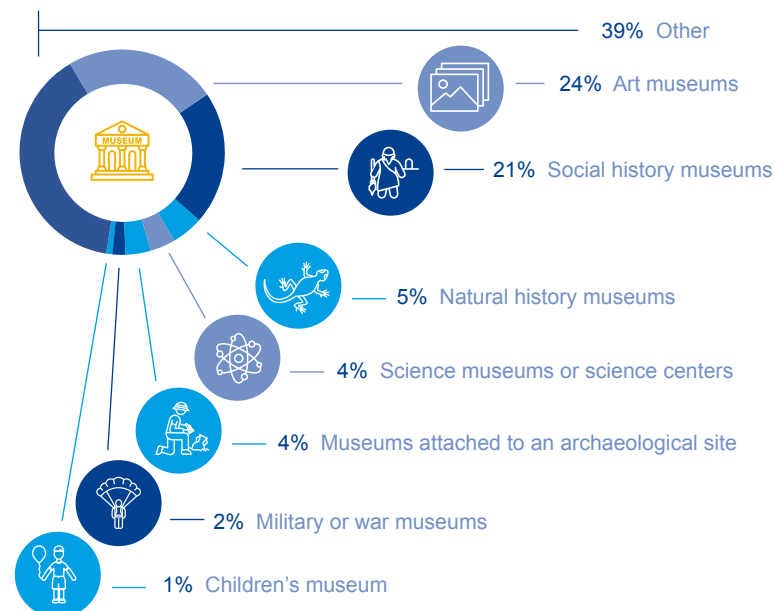
The directors represent the following types of museums: regional or local authority museums (33 per cent); National museums (27 per cent); independent museums (12 per cent); private museums (11 per cent); university museums (6 per cent) and other types of museums, such as corporate museums and museums governed by Non-Governmental Organisations or public-private partnerships (11 per cent).

FIGURE 2: TYPE OF MUSEUM – GOVERNANCE



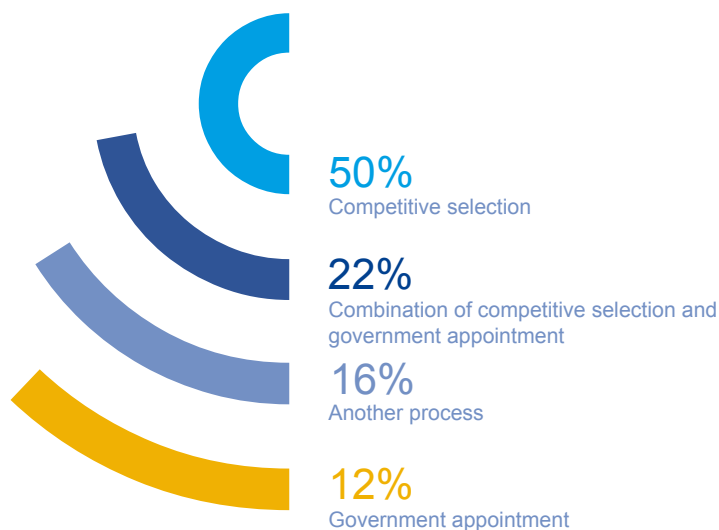
Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

FIGURE 3: TYPE OF MUSEUM – THEME



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

FIGURE 4: PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

With regards to seniority of the survey respondents, 37 per cent had held their current position for less than five years, and 34 per cent had served for over 10 years. More than half had been selected for their leadership role through a competitive selection process.

- In Europe, Oceania and North America, competitive selection is most prevalent.
- In Africa and Asia, respondents were predominantly government appointees.
- In Latin America, appointments were a mix of government appointment and competitive selection.
- In the Middle East, the respondents reported a variety of appointment processes – ranging from appointment by the board, internal selection, executive search, by reference, selection by trustees and direct appointment by the institution's owners.

## LIMITATIONS

During the research, some limitations emerged that must be taken into account when reflecting on this analysis. The first obstacle relates to the target group. There is no specific description of the title 'director' within ICOM's membership data. This complicated the process of addressing the questionnaire to museum directors specifically. Therefore, the survey addressed and included museum leaders in a broader sense. A second limitation is a clear understanding of the concept of 'global representation'. While ICOM is a global association with membership across 117 countries, it is not equally represented in global terms: 84.3 per cent<sup>12</sup> of its members are European institutions. To achieve a more representative global sample, the study actively sought responses from all regions of the world and in multiple languages. In addition, it was critical in terms of the classification of types of museums to understand the characteristics of the institutions that had been defined as 'Others'; i.e. other than the provided list of museums including art, social history, natural history, science, archaeological, military or war or children's museum. Finally, the study was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic when leaders were preoccupied with other, more pressing matters. Achieving a high response rate required considerable effort.

<sup>12</sup> ICOM, 2021a, *ICOM Annual Report 2020*, <https://www.canva.com/design/DAEeKAYxv10/view#2>



## KEY CONCEPTS

### LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

#### 1 / IMPACT OF COVID-19

The year 2020 has tested humankind to an extreme extent. The beginning of the pandemic triggered a crisis consisting of political, economic and social challenges. As we all know, the pandemic heralded an unprecedented period of uncertainty, and, in many places, life appeared to grind to a halt.

Covid-19 has been perceived as a huge wake-up call for museums. Although it became a catalyst for reflection and renewal, as well as a turning point for the adoption of new technologies, many museums were badly hit by prolonged closures and the ensuing loss of income. Understanding the full impact of this social and economic turmoil is essential to this study in order to define the support museum leaders need to overcome this crisis. According to the respondents, the most significant impacts of Covid-19 on museums were the use of digital technology in programming, the increased commitment to the social role of museums, new approaches to audience engagement, the reassessment of the museum's value and the creation of impact with fewer resources.



“

The one thing that Covid-19 has done is [that] it made us start **thinking outside the box**, and thinking, what can we do with reaching out to the people out there?

Covid has **accelerated the need to have this kind of visionary leadership** in our institution.

Africa

“

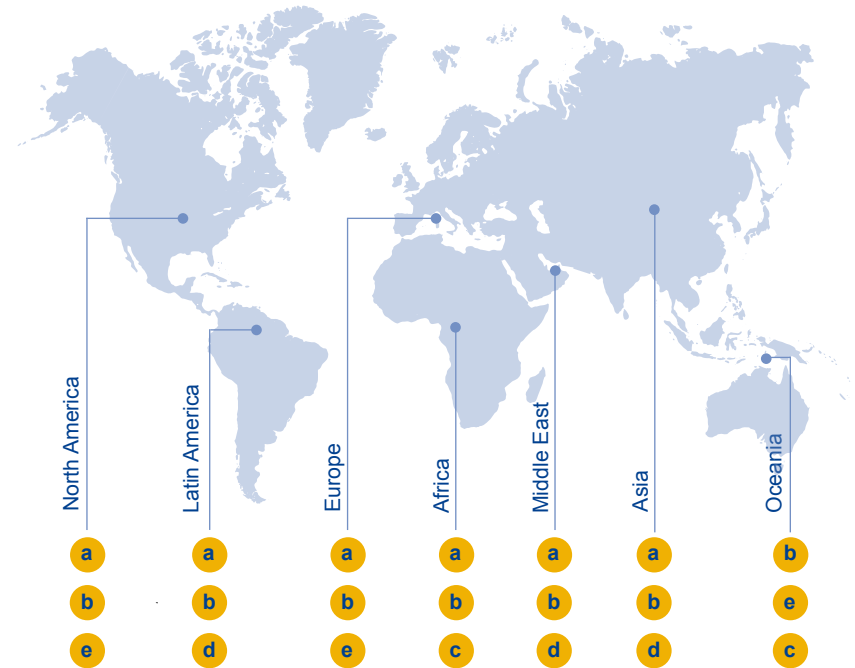
Within a month of Covid-19, I laid out a kind of strategic overview of what this meant for the museum and what I want [...]. We need to be working in three different spaces: the building; of course, there's the digital; and the third one is actually that the community is our museum. In other words, the whole of (the region) and the **communities** within it are the museum. They're not the object of the museum, they **are the museum**.

Europe



Visitors staying behind after an exhibition launch to talk with the curator at the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia © ICOM SEE

FIGURE 5: COVID-19 IMPACTS BY REGION



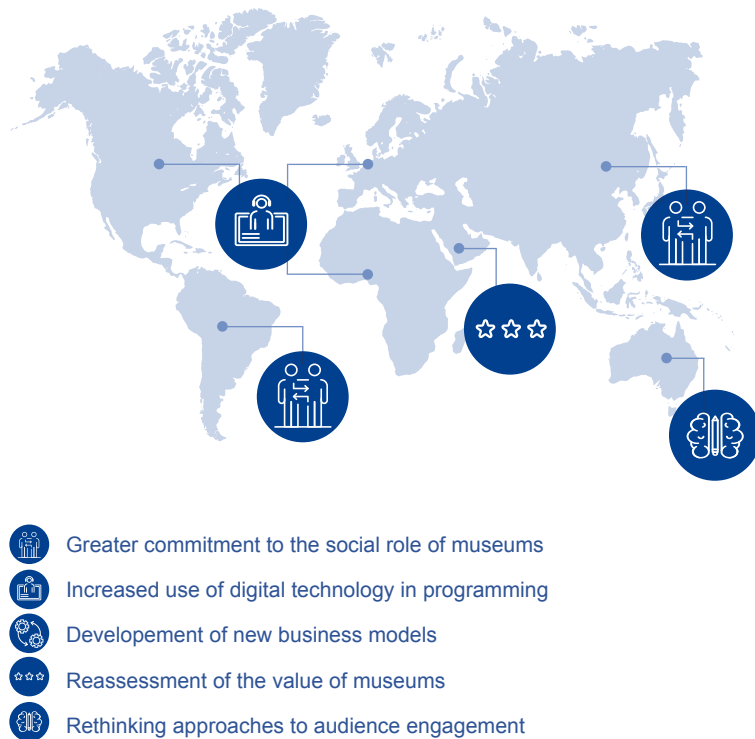
- a ||||| Greater commitment to the social role of museums
- b ||||| Increased use of digital technology in programming
- c ||||| Development of new business models
- d ||||| Reassessment of the value of museums
- e ||||| Rethinking approaches to audience engagement

Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

It is key to understand these impacts on a global level and to learn how Covid-19 has been perceived by each region. The following chart shows the three most prominent **impacts** by region.

According to African and North American museum leaders, the greatest impact was in their use of new technologies. In Asia, the pandemic largely resulted in a greater commitment to the social role of museums. The same was true for museums in Latin America. In the Middle East, the crisis led to a reassessment of the value of museums. As for Oceania, the greatest impact of Covid-19 was on rethinking approaches to audience engagement.

FIGURE 6: COVID-19 MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT BY REGION



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021



Visitors at the Livingstone Museum, Livingstone, Zambia © ICOM ZAMBIA

In addition, 70 per cent of the respondents think that this crisis will have an impact on museum leadership in the future:

- ‘Museum leaders will start to **think more digitally.**’
- ‘A passion for arts will have to be combined with **strategic planning** for business and operational success.’
- ‘Leaders need to **rethink** what the **role** is of museums in the present and for the future.’
- ‘Covid-19 has called for **innovative leaders.**’
- ‘The pandemic has emphasised the need for **broadier networking**, for more cooperation and exchange of ideas and for enhanced modes of **audience engagement.**’
- It is more than ever about **revenue generation** and about a reconsideration of **fundraising, infrastructure** and about **sustainability.**

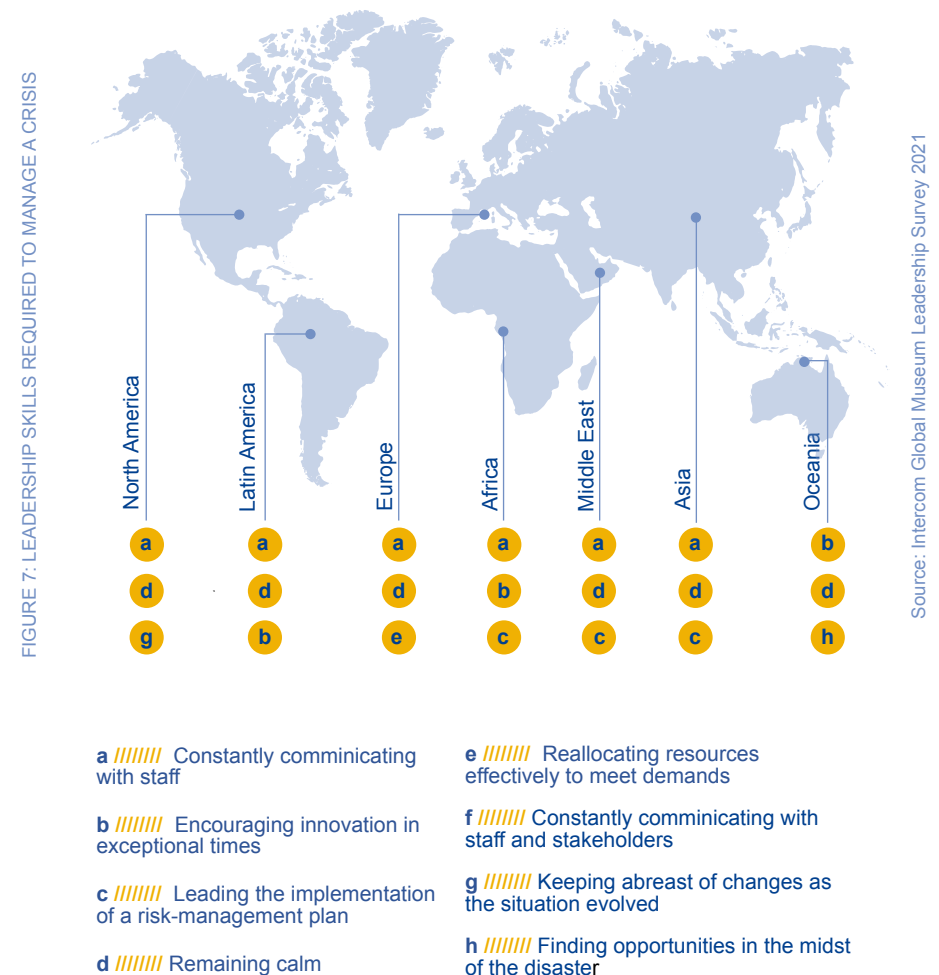
To successfully cope with these changes and influential factors, strong leadership based on trust is crucial. Respondents stated that the following **leadership skills** were most essential to navigate the crisis: (a) constantly communicating with staff, (b) remaining calm, (c) keeping abreast of changes as the situation evolved, (d) adapting to existing roles and creating new roles and (e) maintaining constant communication with stakeholders. Thus, communication, flexibility and staying up to date were considered the primary qualities or actions. Leading a risk-management plan, finding future opportunities in the midst of disaster or being able to advocate effectively were – remarkably – ranked much lower. However, a detailed look at the regional comparisons discloses some differences:

- Constantly communicating with staff is most important in Europe and Africa, and least in the Middle East.
- For North American leaders, effective leadership skills revolved around strong communication and remaining calm.
- Remaining calm was most often mentioned by museum leaders from the Middle East, while it was considered least important in Africa.
- According to African directors, their crisis leadership was more focused on constant communication with staff, on encouraging innovation in these exceptional times, on the implementation of a risk-management plan and, to a lesser extent, effective advocacy.
- Encouraging innovation is deemed most important in Latin America.
- The top three leadership skills in crisis for respondents in Asia were constant communication with staff,

remaining calm and the implementation of a risk-management plan. They were less focused on innovation and advocacy.

- A smaller percentage of museum directors, notably from Oceania, defined this crisis as a moment to seek opportunities in the midst of disaster.

During the in-depth conversations with museum leaders in the third wave of the study, most leaders agreed on the importance of *endurance*, *analytical thinking*, *people skills*, *organisational management* and *fast decision-making* as leadership traits that led







Museum curators and technical staff installing an exhibition in the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia © ICOM SEE

to successful guidance during the crisis. *Confidence* was another keyword.

“

*I see myself as a very **analytical** person. Once I'm aware of the situation, I make decisions quite quickly. The fast decision-making process helps in a situation like [that of] Covid-19. Second, I'm also a leader that is open to suggestions and new ideas. Covid-19 forced us to change our programme direction. That openness and flexibility to listen to new or different ideas is also important. Third, it is also important that the leadership team doesn't panic and is able to instil **confidence** in the staff.*

Asia

“

*Fundamentally, I think it was the **soft people skills**. Maintaining a sense of community among the staff who, for the first time ever, were not working here at the museum. [...] The role that I needed to play for the organisation was [that of] the figurehead but also the person supporting the humanity of the staff, demonstrating empathy and compassion and acknowledging that we were looking out for their welfare, managing the anxiety [...] this was our primary concern.*

North America



Museum leaders develop their organisations by building the skills of their staff © ICOM INDIA

With respect to **support** for leaders facing a crisis situation, the respondents mention staff commitment and resilience and clear guidance from government as crucial. This is followed by preparation in crisis and disaster management and support from the museum board. Respondents surprisingly ranked funding lower than these other factors.

FIGURE 8: SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR MUSEUM LEADERS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

However, there are regional distinctions:

- Museum directors in Africa believe that the existence of a crisis management strategy, followed by clear guidance from government, is the best support during a crisis.
- Government guidance is ranked highest by directors in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania. For the leaders in North America, government guidance is less important.
- Respondents in North America mostly relied on support from the museum board.
- For leaders in Latin America, board support is also significant; however, they rank staff commitment and preparation in crisis and disaster management equally high.
- Aside from government guidance, directors in the Middle East largely count on staff commitment and resilience. Relief funding was ranked lowest.

## 2 / LEADING IN CHANGE

In addition to the current pandemic, respondents mentioned other crises they have faced throughout their careers. Twenty-three per cent have experienced an environmental disaster, such as an earthquake, flood, fire or cyclone, and had to demonstrate leadership in those extreme situations. Almost four per cent mentioned a military conflict, and three per cent of the participants had to deal with a terrorist attack while steering the museum. These circumstances all cause the organisation and its leaders to switch from one plan to another, and possibly from one organisational crisis to another. These unpredictable events cause huge pressure on museum leaders, who rely heavily on adequate change management processes, which, in turn, depend on sufficient autonomy and resources.

“

*In such extreme circumstances you usually do not have the autonomy. Other authorities decide for you. This is from our experience during an earthquake. Resources are shrinking because everyone is in need.*

Europe

Before focusing on the degree of museum leaders' autonomy in their day-to-day leadership practice, it is crucial to explore how and to what degree they are able to implement change, and what factors enable or limit change in their institutions. The following organisational practices are ranked from most difficult to least difficult in terms of **implementing change**:

- Budgetary and financial changes are not easy according to almost 45 per cent of the participants and very difficult to impossible for 23 per cent of the respondents.
- Changes in human resources are hard to implement for 39 per cent of the respondents and impossible for 25 per cent.
- Changes within the organisational structure of a museum are hard to make according to more than 37 per cent of participants. Here, 24 per cent feel that organisational change is very difficult to impossible.
- However, opinions about implementing a new strategic vision and digitisation are divided. Although 44 per cent say implementing a new strategic vision is hard or even impossible, 56 per cent feel it is somewhat easy to very easy. In terms of digitisation, almost 43 per cent state it is difficult to impossible, but, 57 per cent define this as easy.

Digitisation and decolonisation appear to be the easiest changes for respondents to implement, whereas budgetary and financial changes, staff restructuring and control of human resources seem to be more difficult. Control over these resources is vital for museum directors to be able to lead their institutions and to generate positive impact on society, yet these are the areas where it is most difficult for museum leaders to exert influence. Perhaps there is a role for ICOM and INTERCOM to advocate for more autonomy for museum leaders with regards to the resources they require to effectively lead their institutions.

The reasons why change is often so complex is, in the leaders' opinion, primarily due to:

- lack of resources (27 per cent),
- bureaucracy (24 per cent),
- lack of a clear vision for change (12 per cent),



Dr Prokůpek, analyst in the INTERCOM Museum Leadership research team, presenting initial findings of the research at ICOM'S INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 2021 © ICOM CZECH

- lack of government support (11 per cent),
- staff consisting of government appointees with little incentive to change (10 per cent) or
- a lack of time, funding, managerial skills or unmotivated staff (10 per cent).



“

*When you compare us to a private sector company, we can't react as quickly or as efficiently. That puts us at a disadvantage.*

North America

“

***Bureaucracy** normalises and controls. It controls by disciplining. The whole system that pretends to be managerial – well, it is perhaps managerial; it manages – but it basically takes care that the system doesn't make any unexpected move. It does so by ordering many small moves that keep everyone completely occupied within certain mindsets. That's bureaucracy.*

Europe

Bureaucracy plays a major role in the perception of the difficulty of change management practices in the museum sector. Although some museum directors define bureaucracy as a necessary element to receive guidance and structure, for others, it is an ongoing nuisance that slows down the decision-making process. INTERCOM can potentially help museum leaders to navigate these political and bureaucratic restrictions and set a clear vision for change. Perhaps some of the support resources that will be developed as a result of this research could explore the role of advocacy as a core skill for museum leaders to deploy in their dealings with stakeholders. INTERCOM could organise a series of leadership round-table talks and leadership think tanks in the seven global regions of the world as a forum for museum leaders to support each other and work in partnership to advocate for more autonomy and less bureaucracy where required.

“

*Although we are an autonomous institute, we have to follow **certain government rules and regulations**. And that's really painful when it comes to financial management expenditure and new projects.*

Asia

Another museum director in Asia, however, explained that the local government had changed course and had decided to run most of its museums like corporate businesses to increase efficiency:



Dr Alenka Černelič Krošelj, Chair of ICOM SEE, addressing the Slovenian Museums Congress in 2018 © ICOM SEE

“

*These cultural organisations don't need to be bound by so many government rules regarding recruitment of staff or financial purchases. It has led to much **more efficiency** in terms of leading the institution.*

Asia

But introducing change is not always impossible. Some directors reported that, in some cases, they had been successful in bringing about change, specifically related to the museum's mission and vision,<sup>13</sup> the digitisation process (digital transformation), the professional community (making the museum more visible), new business models (financial stability) or the number of visitors (audience-engagement programming).

The main factors that enabled this process were ranked as follows:

- A clear vision of what was needed and why (29 per cent)
- Committed staff (21 per cent)
- A supportive executive board (12 per cent)
- Relevance to audiences and/or stakeholders (12 per cent)

<sup>13</sup> Mission usually refers to a museum's long-term reason for being; vision is time specific and identifies changes to be made and results to be achieved within a specific period. According to the American Alliance of Museums, mission is purpose, vision is future and values are beliefs: American Alliance of Museums, n.d., 'Alliance Reference Guide: Developing a Mission Statement,' <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/developing-a-mission-statement-final.pdf>.

- Sufficient funding (8 per cent)
- Government support (8 per cent)
- Timing (7 per cent)



Visitors engaging with an object © ICOM INDIA

# STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

## 1 / LEADERSHIP ROLE AND SKILLS

To gain a full picture of the participants and their **leadership skills**, this research project looked at what skills, experience and abilities resulted in museum appointments and what particular skills museum leaders have in common. With regards to the **evaluation criteria for their appointment**, the directors indicated that they were nominated based on

- their experience working in museums or the cultural sector (25 per cent),
- their academic expertise and reputation (18 per cent),
- their capacity to implement a vision (16 per cent),
- their ability to lead people (10 per cent) or
- a leadership qualification (7 per cent).

Sound financial management (4 per cent), audience building (4 per cent) or fundraising skills (3 per cent) were ranked lower. A minority of leaders (2.5 per cent) indicated that their appointment was based on their experience in change management, their education or their knowledge of innovation or digitisation practices.

When leaders describe the primary leadership skills and qualities to be an effective leader, they mention:



Ms Horjan, Director of the Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, Croatia, addressing staff and collaborators on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the museum © Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb, Croatia)

- engaging others to achieve the museum's mission and vision (18 per cent),
- experience in the museum field (16 per cent),
- openness to change (16 per cent),
- capacity to manage internal and external stakeholders (12 per cent),
- adaptability (11 per cent),
- managing resources (11 per cent) or
- academic expertise (6 per cent).

It is noteworthy that they do not count the sourcing of additional funds (3 per cent) or advocacy (2 per cent) as primary leadership requirements for

## INTERESTING INCONSISTENCY

*The first inconsistency applies to having the expertise required for the role of museum leader. The respondents reported that academic expertise was important for the appointments panel during their selection process. However, the leaders themselves consider academic knowledge to be less relevant for successful leadership. Only six per cent believe in academic expertise as a crucial factor to succeed as a leader.*

*A second inconsistency relates to the museum's financial management. Ability to manage resources (11 per cent), source additional funds (3 per cent) or advocate for the museum (2 per cent) were ranked as low by the respondents. However, this is in contrast with their opinion about change management and the ability to make changes where the directors pointed out that sufficient resources and less bureaucracy were essential to successfully make changes.*

museums. This raises questions about the role of an entrepreneurial organisation and of the director as an *entrepreneurial leader*. The key question for future research would be whether entrepreneurship is as important as some would lead us to believe.

Another way to understand how the leaders' professional skills support them throughout their career is to look at their professional development, in other words, their academic background and connection with professional associations. The participants attributed their confidence and growth as a leader partly to

- academic specialisation and reputation (25 per cent),
- membership of professional associations (16 per cent),
- specific leadership courses (13 per cent),
- museum studies courses (13 per cent) or
- business studies courses (8 per cent).

Notably, only 8 per cent of the participants consider a business management course as a key contribution to their leadership success and confidence. Yet the in-depth interviews revealed that there might already be a shift from the traditional role of the museum specialist at the helm of a museum to the more general business profile of the leader who masters both academic and business practices.



“

What you already see is that lots of museums have directors who do have business skills, who do have networking skills, who do have fundraising skills, and the traditional image of an art historian becoming a director is not 100 per cent applicable anymore. You do see lots of people with a more **entrepreneurial background**. Those are fields of study which have become much more important in the last 10 years. Many of my colleagues are indeed entrepreneurs rather than art historians, which goes for myself as well. I'm not an art historian at all.

I did study law, which I didn't finish, but I did follow a course in cultural entrepreneurship, which was not a complete study but just a few subjects. That has helped me a lot. As a director of a small museum, you have to know a little about everything – a little about marketing, a little bit about bookkeeping, a little about organisational issues and a little about art, of course. That's very important.

Europe

“

I come from a project management background. I don't come from an academic background or a curatorial background. If I had started my career as an art historian, I would not see things the way I see them. I feel I have an advantage. For many museums, the curator is the most important thing. In our museum, the curator is not the most important person. The most important person is the educator and the **fundraising manager**, because the fundraising manager has to find the funds to sustain the museum, and then the educator has to define programmes that help us achieve our mission.

Africa

## 2 / AUTONOMY

Leading successfully and implementing change requires a fair degree of autonomy. But how much autonomy do museum directors really have? The survey covered three vital leadership areas over which museum directors need to exert some degree of control: (i) financial resources, (ii) organisational structure and their institution's (iii) cultural programme.

With regards to autonomous control over **(i) financial resources**, this study shows that 27 per cent of the directors claim to have complete autonomy over the annual budget and how to use it. In 35 per cent of cases, they need approval from the board of trustees or from both the board and the government (29 per cent) to allocate their budget. Nevertheless, 9 per cent of the participants cannot decide how the **annual budget** is used. Regarding earned income, 62 per cent of the museum leaders state that they can keep these earnings and choose how to use them for the benefit of the museum.



Ms Nkombwe, Director of the Moto Moto Museum in Mbala, Zambia, addressing a stakeholders planning meeting on an Eco-Tourism project © ICOM ZAMBIA

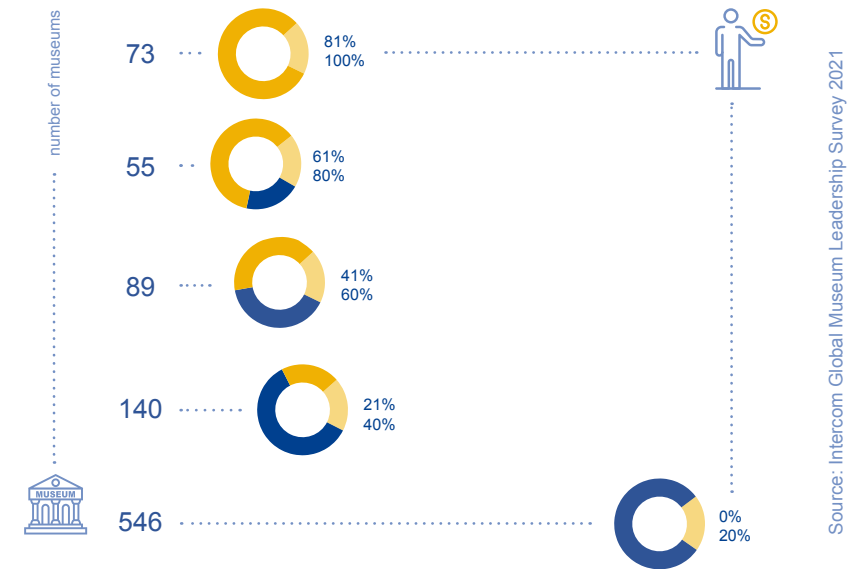


A socially distanced concert in the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia  
© ICOM SEE

**Earned income** plays an important role in a museum's budget and its financial strength. However, when questioned on this aspect, 60 per cent of directors state that their institution's earned income (e.g. from ticketing, retail, café/restaurant, merchandise, licencing, venue hire and programming<sup>14</sup>) is lower than 20 per cent. Another 16 per cent stated that their earned income counts for 21 to 40 per cent of their total income; for 10 per cent of the respondents, this ranges between 41 and 60 per cent. Only 8 per cent of the directors succeed in being self-sufficient and have a guaranteed earned income between 81 and 100 per cent.

<sup>14</sup> Some leaders include philanthropic **donations** under earned income.

FIGURE 9: PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET FROM EARNED INCOME



When analysed by type of museum, the survey results show that university museums generate the lowest percentage of earned income, followed by regional or local authority museums and, finally, national museums. As can be expected, Independent and private museums on the other hand generate the highest earned income.



Promotion of museum publications at INTERLIBER, International Book Fair in Zagreb, Croatia © Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb, Croatia)



## Looking at regional comparisons

- the lowest level of earned income is seen in Europe,
- Africa reports low earned income as well and
- leaders in Asia and Latin America reported the highest percentages of earned income.

With respect to autonomous control over the **(ii) organisational structure**, the survey data reveal that

- 35 per cent of the participants say they need approval from the board of trustees in case of organisational restructuring,
- 28 per cent can make changes but only when approved by both board and government,



Traditional Fashion Show, Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, Croatia  
© Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb, Croatia)

- 23 per cent of the participants have full autonomy and
- the remaining 14 per cent of directors cannot alter the organisational structure.

With respect to defining the number of jobs required in the museum, twenty per cent of the directors state that they have complete autonomy. Thirty per cent of the leaders need approval from their board of trustees. Thirty per cent state that both the government and the board must give consent. The rest, twenty per cent, have no power to decide the number of roles in their museum.

When it comes to choosing and appointing new staff, however, half of the directors (50 per cent) stated that they have full freedom to do so. For 38 per cent of the respondents, approval from the board of trustees or government is obligatory. Twelve per cent of the directors have no independence in recruiting new employees.

“

*New employment means greater budget, and we know that public servants are well protected by law. This influences the autonomy in the [human resources] sector.*

*Europe*

Finally, with regards to autonomy over the museum's **(iii) cultural programme**, the process of exhibit development and programming, the survey data show that board or governmental intervention is lower. Museum leaders appear to have more influence in this

area: 69 per cent of the respondents have complete autonomy over these content-related decisions. Seventeen per cent require board approval. Eleven per cent need both board and government authorisation. Unfortunately, 2 per cent have no licence to decide on exhibitions and programmes at all.

Taking these factors into account, the data, analysed by region, shows how the overall degree of autonomy ranks from highest to lowest level:

- North America (77 per cent)
- Oceania (59 per cent)
- Middle East (57 per cent)
- Latin America (51 per cent)
- Europe (50 per cent)
- Asia (47.7 per cent)
- Africa (47 per cent)

*We have great autonomy in terms of creativity, like in creative works on planning and developing and submitting ideas. But we have limitation in terms of communication or publication, because we have a separate institutional communication section, which is very controlled. [...] Forms, so many forms, it's like too much security.*

*Middle East*



Visitors using digital interpretation in the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia  
© ICOM SEE

“

*I think that accountability needs to be more distributed and more representative of society than the traditional governance models provide. [...] It's got to be the right accountability, and it's got to be the right **model of governance** as well. [...] Legally, we are always going to be accountable to the board of trustees, but we're trying to develop models, which, in practice, bring in **other voices** much more strongly than before.*

*Europe*

### 3 / CHALLENGES

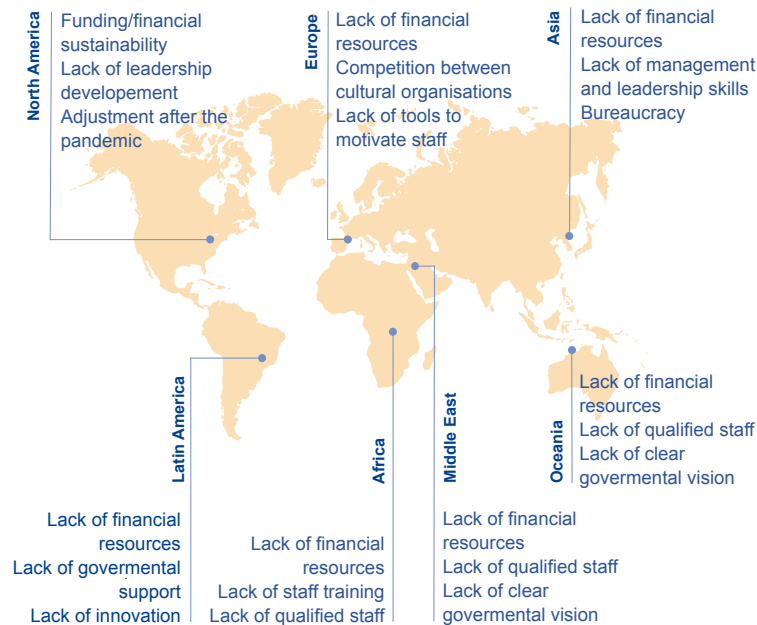
The pandemic has brought into sharp focus a series of ongoing challenges for the museum sector, some of which relate to day-to-day management. There are also broader concerns about the future role of museums, the social role of museums and their governance and business models.

The future role of museums will relate to audience engagement, sustainability, technology and financial resilience, which often require a range of new skills such as

- finding new revenue streams,
- staff development and training,
- a balance between academic and business practices,
- reshaping leadership and adaptable, responsive organisational culture and
- professional support and leadership training.

A regional comparison of ongoing issues recorded by the survey participants reveals many similarities; a lack of funding and a lack of professional development are common concerns:

FIGURE 10: MUSEUM LEADERS' KEY CONCERNS BY REGION



Source: Intercom Global Museum Leadership Survey 2021

The second range of concerns relates to museums' role in society. Many museum directors described the pandemic as a period of profound reflection and a quest for what society needs. Redefining that social role is a crucial task for every museum leader.

Furthermore, there are existing imbalances that need to be addressed when facing the future of the museum. Covid-19 was again an example of how wealthier and more powerful larger institutions often survive, while smaller and more local institutions struggle. A revision of the existing museum governance and enterprise models, which could be more distributed and representative of society, is therefore another critical matter within the museum sector.

“

*One of the drivers is that the power relationships of museums don't work well, because clearly we still get a very selective group in society who work with us, even despite all the efforts we've been making with community organisations and others. There is something fundamentally flawed in the model, which no amount of having learning teams or activist curators in itself will change. We therefore have to **rethink what the museum is**.*

Europe

“

*Our business model is not working. It's failing. We have to look for a **different kind of business model** [...] It's always limited skills, limited resource, limited budget, right? So the point is to keep frugal at any time. [...] It is more surviving kill.*

Middle East

## FUTURE SUPPORT

### 1 / HOW CAN WE FOREARM MUSEUM LEADERS? PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Hopefully, museums will emerge stronger from this pandemic. Hopefully, Covid-19 has led to increased flexibility and resilience. Yet it would be presumptuous to assume that a crisis – whether political, economic, social or a similar global human health disaster – could not occur again in the coming decades. Covid-19 could, in this respect, be considered an eye-opener. For any industry, the key lesson will be to consider how we can prepare our leaders for an uncertain future. How can we make sure there is more resilience and flexibility to survive



Exhibition in the Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, Croatia © Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb, Croatia)

a crisis of global proportions, which reaches into every aspect of human society? How can we support our museum leaders in turning the aforementioned challenges into opportunities?

The response to the crucial question of what role ICOM could play in the future and how it could provide the most efficient, innovative and stimulating assistance is thought-provoking. There is no particular regional distinction here. All the leaders more or less agree on the most essential forms of support and follow-up. Support in the form of **networking, exchange of knowledge and best practices** and **professional development – especially leadership training and leadership coaching mentorships** – were often cited as potential areas of support for the museum leaders who gave their time and reflections in the survey, for which we are wholeheartedly grateful.

“

*I'm a firm believer in **networking**, but I do think with my colleagues. There are many of my colleagues who are still discovering things for themselves. I always say someone has been lying awake of your problem already. Pick up the phone, use your computer and find your colleague, because the best practice and also the worst practice is already there. I think, in general, for museum directors, especially for the midsized to smaller museums, those networking skills will become more important. I don't mean the local network, but rather the **national networking and international networking**.*

Europe



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The **international scope** is very important, because you can make your own situation much more relative to another situation. It's not just you who is in trouble and is fending for himself, but many directors do. I do think, apart from developing personal skills, it's the knowledge that people are dealing with the same problem – be it in Asia, Africa or the Americas – we're all dealing with the same problems.

Europe

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Mentoring programmes based on **personal physical exchanges** are, for me, very important.

North America

“

I'm trying to learn about fundraising and sustainability. Fundraising is an issue. I am trying to convince the others and the board that we should employ a grants officer. Yes, a person to produce grant applications. I'm trying also to develop business skills.

Africa

“

**Fundraising skills**, especially for smaller museums, are something that the director has to do himself, and I think that it will become much more important and much more time-consuming in the future.

Europe

“

**Project management** [...] I have to improve myself in managing the time, managing the resource. It is not just a schedule of things to do in time, but also the resource, right? And then [...] a course for policy writing.

Middle East



Children enjoying hands on activities at the Copperbelt Museum, Ndola, Zambia © ICOM ZAMBIA

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Corporate sector individuals often come into the museum asking, 'what's the outcome?' They're very **outcome driven**. [...] Previously, when I was working for a government institution, they were not so much interested in outcomes, but rather in outputs. They were looking at, 'okay, so last year you brought in 100,000 visitors; next year, can you bring in 120,000?' They were interested in those quantitatives. Whereas, in the corporate world, they're not so much looking at the numbers, but outcome.

Asia



## 2 / GLOBAL LEADERSHIP MENTORING PROGRAMME

To understand and measure the socio-economic impact of global crises on museums, INTERCOM's research shows that human capital is crucial and must be supported in relevant capacity-building initiatives, empowering people, providing networking opportunities and allowing for the exchange of best practices. The research hinted at some similarities in challenges and regional differences in addressing them. To maximise the use of best practices and a personal approach, the recommendation is to develop a global leadership mentoring programme. Such a programme would foster the culture of sharing in a professional community, where common knowledge is accessible and tailored to specific needs. By boosting the personal potential of leaders worldwide, ICOM can strengthen its global position with the aim to reshape and reevaluate museum work for the new decade.



The Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia © ICOM SEE

INTERCOM's survey and interviews also brought to the forefront the need for leaders to reshape their values as well as both internal and external communication with staff, audiences and stakeholders. Embracing digital is not a technical question anymore but an essential part of the museum's core business – interaction and engagement with their audiences. A mentoring model could also address these needs and match mentees and mentors according to identified goals and needs. In fact, all respondents confirmed the shift from on-site to digital engagement, and a number of museum leaders expressed the need to acquire knowledge in the field.

A mentorship programme could also help museum leaders to become more self-reflective. To be leaders of change in their museums, they have to be ready to reshape their own role as well. The more complex working environment requires teamwork and a genuinely collaborative approach. A 2021 study by Egon Zehnder revealed that 'nine in ten of our respondents agreed that, in recent years, the CEO has moved into the centre of louder, more diverse and diverging voices – "a tsunami of information and opinion," as one put it', which certainly brings additional stress to a leader.<sup>15</sup>

A mentorship programme could offer support for personal change, and it could also address one of the common criticisms of leaders – that they are not listening to people. The Egon Zehnder study indicates that not listening and being impatient with others are seen as two significant blind spots for leaders<sup>16</sup> – many museum professionals also often complain that their voices are not heard enough. The obvious question is why? Is it the number of voices or a lack of common

<sup>15</sup> Egon Zehnder, 2021, *It starts with the CEO: A global study*, <https://www.egonzehnder.com/cdn/serve/article-pdf/1633076072-1521a75915a12537477d-902499a47cf0.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Egon Zehnder, 2021.

perspective? Mentoring could be a healthy process through which to find some answers.

### 3 / ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Crises have also brought new issues to museums' everyday agendas: security and health procedures have changed, many museum activities have moved online and a significant number of employees work from home. New roles have appeared in the IT sector, and many leaders identified the lack of those skills among the museum staff. Large museums may have a well equipped team in charge of digital content, digital marketing, gaming and similar must-haves for high-quality virtual engagement with audiences, but many smaller and middle-sized museums lack such support completely. Their authorities do not see the need to increase the number of museum staff and therefore block any new employment in the field. INTERCOM's survey indicates that complete liberty in creating new posts in museums is a rare commodity for museum directors.

Funding and fundraising was a key issue present in this research. However, it was ranked as a low priority on the self-defined list of skills required for museum leaders. Perhaps this reveals an ongoing dependence on public funding; at the same time, however, ICOM's report on Covid-19 impacts indicates that significant decreases in financing museums is expected worldwide.<sup>17</sup> This is an area where new skills and roles are required at the highest level in museums, not in traditional fundraising but in developing financial resilience for museums.

<sup>17</sup> ICOM, 2021b.



Dr Prokůpek, analyst in the INTERCOM Museum Leadership research team, presenting initial findings of the research at ICOM'S INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 2021 © ICOM CZECH

Therefore, perhaps it is time to review the roles and skills necessary for museums to thrive in the next decades of the 21st century. The current ICOM European frame of reference for museum professions was developed by the International Committee for the Training of Personnel (ICTOP) in 2008.<sup>18</sup> We recommend that it be updated to reflect the changed circumstances in which museums now exist and expanded to include frames of reference for museum professionals in all regions of the world. We suggest that ICOM as a global professional organisation supports INTERCOM, ICTOP and other partnering international committees to draft these new global frames of reference.

<sup>18</sup> A. Ruge, 2008, *Museum professions – a European frame of reference* (Berlin: ICOM International Committee for the Training of Personnel), [http://ictop.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ICTOP-Museum-Profession\\_frame\\_of\\_reference\\_2008.pdf](http://ictop.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ICTOP-Museum-Profession_frame_of_reference_2008.pdf).



RE-ORG STORAGE workshop organised in Zagreb in cooperation with ICOM and ICCROM © Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb, Croatia)

#### **4 / INTERCOM'S KNOWLEDGE-SHARING PLATFORM FOR MUSEUM LEADERS**

Many of the recommendations in this report outline initiatives to support the world's current museum leaders. These ideas can be implemented through the development of an online platform or portal. This portal is intended to be a repository of resources, leadership networks, capacity-building programmes, mentoring, advocacy initiatives and case studies for the world's museum leaders. This initiative will be the subject of INTERCOM's next project, and the project team welcome any ideas and contributions.

## CONCLUSION

This first INTERCOM museum leadership research project has explored the realities of how museums are led in continuing crises all over the globe, and many similarities are evident as a result of the universal threat of Covid-19. However, some regional differences were also identified, although they require further research in the next stage of the project. This initial research project has established a benchmark from which to understand the current realities of museum leadership in different regions of the world. We hope to carry out regular research on an annual or biennial basis to build on this data set to gain a picture of how museum leadership and challenges change over time. This current research has provided insight into how museum leaders have managed the short-term and long-term impacts of Covid-19 and in the light of the many existing challenges that museum leaders are experiencing.

This museum leadership analysis has also identified weaknesses in governance practices that have contributed to museums' vulnerable situation. This has helped INTERCOM to contextualise the impact of crises in relation to the different leadership cultures prevailing in specific global regions. Reliance on governmental support and degree of autonomy are perceived differently in different regions.



Inevitably, online audience engagement, together with specific digital content tailored for new audiences, has cast a new light on museum trends and needs. This research aimed to identify how leaders are coping with these new demands. The creation of effective online programmes requires additional funding, sophisticated equipment and skilled staff, which many museums lack. The competition in the field is huge, and only high-quality digital engagement will attract users and audiences. On the other hand, it is difficult to monetise the online offer, and income on-site has decreased significantly for many of the world's museums. Museum leaders feel it is hard to compete in this market, and they have difficulties in keeping up with the fast pace of technology and innovation in the digital realm.



Dr Alenka Črnelič Krošelj, Director of the Posavje Museum Brežice, Slovenia with visitors in the galleries © ICOM SEE

This research presents valuable insights, and the survey data are accessible in this publication and online. The project has fulfilled its objective to widely disseminate the findings of the research into global museum leadership for the benefit of ICOM and its members. It also provides data from which to develop specific capacity and resilience-building initiatives for museum leaders. These will provide museum leaders with solutions, resources and case studies that will support them in developing their activities.

Increasing museum resilience is a common endeavour of museum professionals who are empowering each other with their knowledge and innovative approaches. There is still an open question about the tools for leaders to use when building resilience in their institutions and why it is important to focus on this. Although this research has established the most significant areas for support, there is not yet a clear idea of what resilience is and how to develop it. However, the omnipresent demand for flexibility and change clearly shows that leaders do not think that museum business will return to pre-pandemic 'norms'. As we all well know, Covid-19 has tested museums worldwide and forced them to adapt to the so-called 'new normal'; it has also become an agent of change and professional growth. ICOM can take a leading role in supporting this growth through the expertise of its members.

This project has also demonstrated the importance of collaboration and cooperation within ICOM as a global agent of support for museums. Not only national and international committees proved to be essential but also regional alliances, because they can navigate regional differences and needs more effectively than other actors in the field.



The project outputs have been achieved as planned. This report is available in both printed and digital formats and in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Arabic). In the next phase, we intend to add Chinese and Russian versions.

The most valuable output of this research is the feedback from museum leaders, which will enable us to develop an online Knowledge-Sharing Platform for Museum Leadership, through which to provide resources and capacity-building activities focused on developing leadership capabilities. This will be supplemented with regional in-person activities and events to further support museum leadership development for the world's museum leaders.

Additionally, we propose the development of a global leadership mentoring programme to help build resilience in museums. In this way, valuable experiences of global leaders can be shared and adapted to the specific regional needs. The project team intends to build on discussions at the ICOM Prague International Symposium in August 2021, where the initial findings of this INTERCOM report were shared. Furthermore, the theme of leadership has been included in the programme and in joint meetings for the ICOM General Conference in Prague in 2022.

Besides the main planned event in Prague, the leadership project has also been disseminated at several conferences, including Solidarity in Culture (international online conference, Zagreb, Croatia, March 2021), the INTERCOM annual meeting and conference (hybrid event, Baku, Azerbaijan, October 2021) and the ICOM SEE colloquium (on-site meeting, Brežice, Slovenia, November 2021).

In conclusion, the INTERCOM research team would like to highlight the new era that museums are entering,



ICOM SEE Colloquium in Brežice, Slovenia © ICOM SEE

which will support the development of leadership practice and influence the way organisations are run. The survey and interviews undertaken during this research clearly show that trend. The key message for leaders is that they have to make careful choices in the process of changing their institutions in order to serve different expectations of their stakeholders, funding bodies and audiences.

A growing number of digital initiatives are being developed in museums. This has a huge impact on the traditional skill set expected of employees. The question of museum expertise will need to change on various levels, from strategic and resource-generating to digital transformation of institutions, which will then require people with technical knowledge and audience-engagement skills. Leaders are required to have a vision and explore new perspectives for their

institutions. The basic question for many is how to guide the institution towards the future that museum professionals want and to what degree reliance on governments and local authorities can be helpful in this process.

Leading museums means choosing the paths to explore and those to avoid. On this journey, decision-making is a key tool that leaders have at their disposal, weighing risks and developing opportunities. On this path, there are roadblocks, internal and external, global and local crises, which leaders are supposed to overcome or remove – helped by various stakeholders and using creative innovative approaches and strategies. The principal purpose is to build the resilience of museums to empower them to be able to continue fulfilling their mission. By anticipating challenges, leaders take the first step in creating effective measures to confront them. Carefully balancing risks and finding opportunities for their museums, leaders are creating milestones for change, and the necessity to change has been the very focus of this INTERCOM project.

We send our heartfelt gratitude to the 906 museum leaders from all over the world who have contributed to this research, and we look forward to working with them and their colleagues to find effective ways of supporting them as they lead their institutions into the future.



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APENDIX A

# survey questionnaire

English

## There are two main reasons why INTERCOM is undertaking this research project and inviting you to participate.

The first reason is that, while there are many studies on leadership in general (and an increasing number on museum leadership in particular) there is no global picture of museum leadership which captures the differences between cultural contexts. It is this variation which INTERCOM is seeking to identify through this current study.

The second reason has been driven by the current pandemic, the impact which it has had on museums and the exceptional effort which it is demanding of its leaders. Are the world's museum leaders sufficiently prepared and supported to navigate this crisis? What support will our leaders need in the future as unanticipated events become the 'new normal'? How do leaders articulate the value of museums in a world where Covid is changing the nature of the museum experience?

This survey is directed to Directors, Associate Directors and Department Heads of Museums. We know you are busy people and INTERCOM appreciates your time and willingness to participate in this survey. The combined responses will provide a picture of museum leadership across the globe- the differences that exist as the result of cultural variation and that which is common in spite of difference. Your answers will help INTERCOM plan its programme of current and future support for museum leaders as we look to the next decade. All of your responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially.

## WHERE YOU WORK

These first questions will help us to understand the context in which you are working.

### 1. You are

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer Not to say
- ☐ Other (please specify)

### 2. In which country do you work

### 3. Chosse which most accurately describes the type of museum where you work:

- ☐ An art museum
- ☐ A natural history museum
- ☐ A social history museum
- ☐ A science museum or science center
- ☐ A children's museum
- ☐ A military or war museum
- ☐ A museum attached to an archaeological site
- ☐ Other (please specify)

### 4. The museum in which you work is:

- ☐ A national museum
- ☐ A regional or local authority museum
- ☐ An independent museum (a registered charity, trust, etc)
- ☐ A university museum
- ☐ A private museum
- ☐ A founder-led museum
- ☐ Other (please specify)



WHERE YOU WORK

5. Is your museum supported by funding from (choose all that apply):

A national government (what %?)

A regional government (what %?)

A local government (what %?)

Other (please describe)

6. What % of your annual budget is from earned income?

- ☐ 0 - 20%
- ☐ 21 - 40%
- ☐ 41 - 60%
- ☐ 61 - 80%
- ☐ 81 - 100%

7. Can you keep these earnings and choose how they are used for the benefit of your museum?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but only part of them (please specify what percentage of your earned income can you keep?)

WHERE YOU WORK

8. Which best describes your leadership role?

- ☐ A Director
- ☐ An Associate/Deputy Director
- ☐ Other (please specify)

9. For how many years have you been in this position?

- ☐ Over 10 years
- ☐ Between 5-9 years
- ☐ Under 5 years

10. Is the process of appointment in your country:

- ☐ Competitive selection
- ☐ Government appointment
- ☐ A combination of both
- ☐ Another process (please specify)

11. When you were applying for your current position, which 3 main criteria were the appointments panel looking for in selecting a Director?

- ☐ Academic expertise and reputation
- ☐ Experience working in museums or the cultural sector
- ☐ Willingness to implement government policy
- ☐ Leading people
- ☐ Fundraising skills
- ☐ Audience-building
- ☐ A leadership qualification
- ☐ Dealing with external stakeholders
- ☐ Good financial management
- ☐ Capacity to implement a vision
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## YOUR LEADERSHIP ROLE

**12. Based on your own leadership experience, what are the 3 most important skills and qualities which you think are needed to be an effective and successful museum leader? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Adaptability
- ☐ Openness to change
- ☐ Self- knowledge
- ☐ Academic expertise
- ☐ Experience in the museum field
- ☐ Capacity to manage internal and external stakeholders
- ☐ Engaging others to achieve the museum's mission and vision
- ☐ Managing resources
- ☐ Sourcing additional funds
- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**13. As a Director, can you decide the number of jobs required in your museum?**

- ☐ Yes, I have complete autonomy to do this
- ☐ Only with Board of Trustees approval
- ☐ Only with Board and government approval
- ☐ No

**14. As a Director, can you choose and appoint your own staff?**

- ☐ Yes, I have complete autonomy to do this
- ☐ Only with Board of Trustee approval
- ☐ Only with Board and government approval
- ☐ No

**15. As a Director, can you change the organisational structure?**

- ☐ Yes, I have complete autonomy to do this
- ☐ Only with Board of Trustees approval
- ☐ Only with Board and government approval
- ☐ No

## YOUR LEADERSHIP ROLE

**16. As a Director, can you decide how your annual budget is used?**

- ☐ Yes, I have complete autonomy to do this
- ☐ Only with Board of Trustees approval
- ☐ Only with Board and government approval
- ☐ No

**17. As a Director, can you decide on exhibitions and programmes?**

- ☐ Yes, I have complete autonomy to do this
- ☐ Only with Board of Trustees approval
- ☐ Only with Board and government approval
- ☐ No

**18. How easy/difficult is it to implement following changes in your museums?**

	1	2	3	4	5
Organisational restructuring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digitisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collections decolonisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budgetary and financial changes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human resources changes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Implementing a new strategic vision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(1 = very easy, 2 = somewhat easy, 3 = not easy, 4 = very difficult, 5 = impossible)

**19. If you answered not easy, very difficult or impossible in any of the above areas which three main factors did you find work against change:**

- ☐ Bureaucracy
- ☐ Staff are government appointees and have little incentive to change practice
- ☐ Lack of a clear vision for change
- ☐ Not enough resources
- ☐ Lack of support from the Board
- ☐ Lack of support from government
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## YOUR LEADERSHIP ROLE

**20. Thinking back over your time as Director, what are the most significant changes that you have been able to make?**

**21. Which 3 main factors helped you in making that change possible?**

- ☐ A clear vision of what was needed and why
- ☐ A committed staff
- ☐ A supportive Executive Board
- ☐ Government support
- ☐ Sufficient funding
- ☐ Relevance to audiences and/or stakeholders
- ☐ Timing
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## SUPPORTING MUSEUM LEADERSHIP

**22. What kinds of professional development have helped you to develop the confidence and skills to become a museum leader? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Academic specialisation and reputation
- ☐ Specific museum leadership courses
- ☐ Professional associations
- ☐ Museum studies courses
- ☐ Business studies courses
- ☐ Membership of professional associations
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

**23. In your opinion, what are the 3 most important issues facing museum leadership in your country today?**

Issue Nr. 1

Issue Nr. 2

Issue Nr. 3

**24. What formal and informal support is available for museum directors in your country? Please describe**

**25. In your opinion, what role could INTERCOM play in supporting museum leadership?**

LEADERSHIP IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

Museum leaders are increasingly required to respond to external events beyond their control. In recent times, this has been a worldwide health crisis caused by a pandemic but other events include environmental disasters, catastrophic fires and military conflict

**26. In your experience as a museum leader have you ever had to respond to an unanticipated crisis from an external source?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**27. What kind of crises have you had to deal with as a leader?**

- ☐ Environmental disaster (flood, fire, earthquake, cyclone etc.)
- ☐ Military conflict
- ☐ Terrorist attack
- ☐ Epidemic or pandemic
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**28. In your opinion, which leadership skills are/were the most important to manage the recent crisis? Please rate in order of importance where 1=most important and 10=least important.**

- ☐ Keeping in constant communication with staff
- ☐ Keeping in constant communication with stakeholders
- ☐ Remaining calm
- ☐ Being able to advocate effectively
- ☐ Being able to adapt existing roles and create new roles
- ☐ Keeping abreast of changes as the situation evolved
- ☐ Leading the implementation of a risk management plan
- ☐ Finding future opportunities in the midst of disaster
- ☐ Encouraging innovation in exceptional times

LEADERSHIP IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

- ☐ Reallocating resources effectively to meet the demands of the crisis

**29. What kind of support is important for museum leaders facing crisis situations? Please rate in order of importance where 1=most important and 7=least important.**

- ☐ Clear guidance from government
- ☐ Support and backing from the museum Board
- ☐ Staff commitment and resilience
- ☐ Relief funding
- ☐ Preparation in crisis and disaster management
- ☐ The existence of a crisis management strategy
- ☐ Supportive network of colleagues from which one seek advice

**30. In your opinion, what will be the most important impacts of Covid-19 on museum practice? Please rate in order of importance where 1=most important and 11=least important.**

- ☐ Greater commitment to the social role of museums
- ☐ Increased use of digital technology in programming
- ☐ Achieving impact with fewer resources
- ☐ Engaging communities in future direction-setting
- ☐ Reassessing the value of museums
- ☐ Rethinking approaches to audience engagement
- ☐ Establishing resource-sharing partnerships

LEADERSHIP IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

- ☐ Maintaining sponsor and donor engagement
- ☐ Developing new business models
- ☐ Reduction in staffing
- ☐ None of the above

**31. In your opinion, will the recent pandemic have an impact on museum leadership in the future?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**32. If you answered YES, please describe what the impact/s will be**

**33. Would you be willing to be interviewed with one of our research team members at a later date?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**34. Please provide your email address**

**35. Was this survey easy to use?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Your feedback about how we might make it more accessible would be appreciated.**

Thanks for your time and help. Your feedback on these questions will help INTERCOM set its strategic directions for museum leadership.

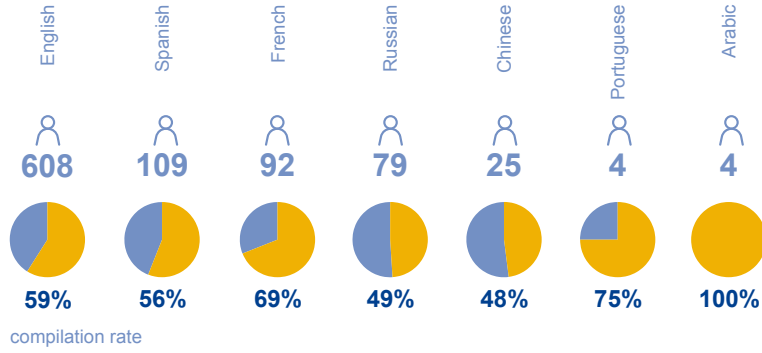


APENDIX B

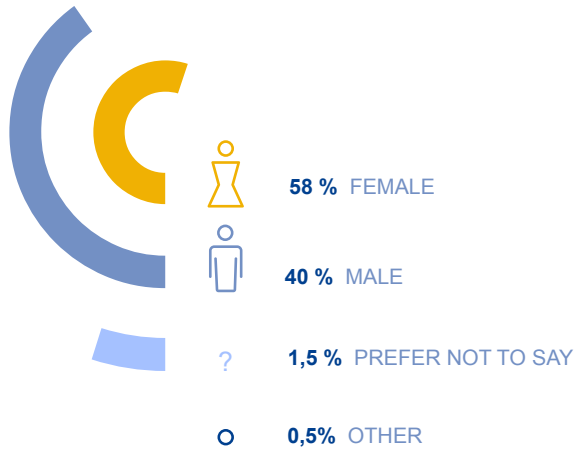
# Survey data

## PARTICIPANT DATA

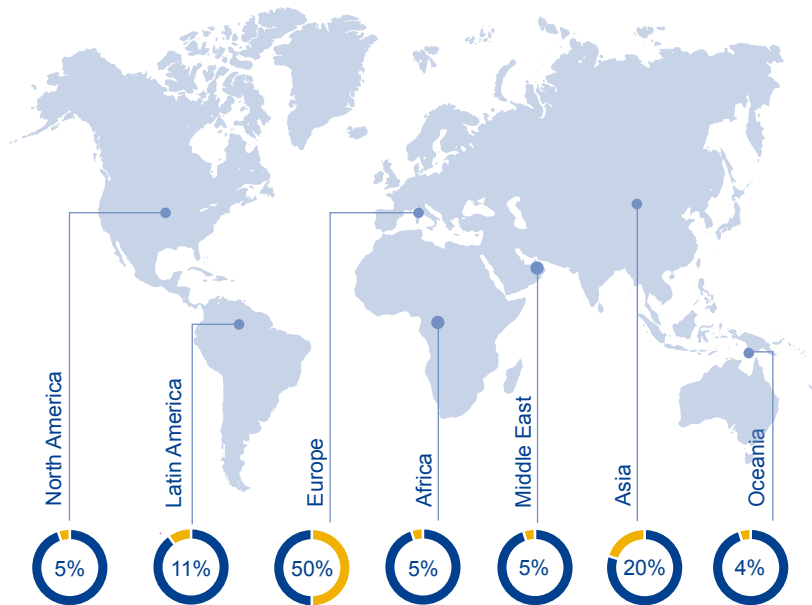
### I PROPORTIONAL DATA COLLECTION



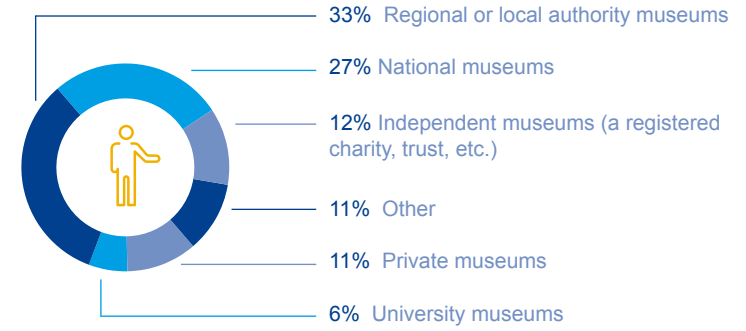
### II GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



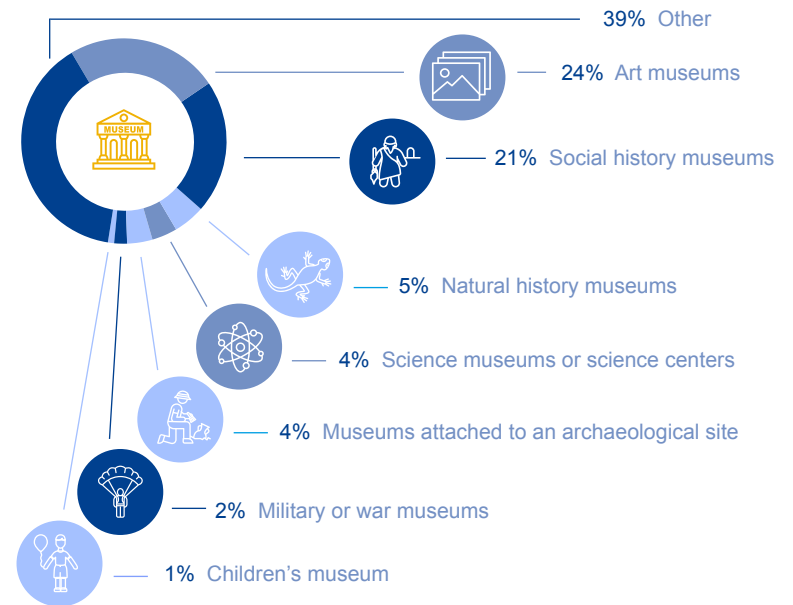
### III GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF RESPONDENTS



### IV TYPE OF MUSEUM – GOVERNANCE



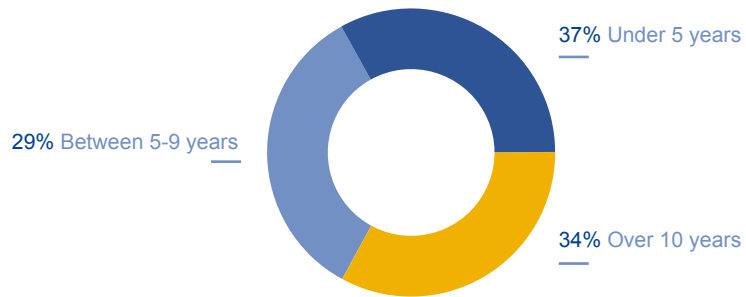
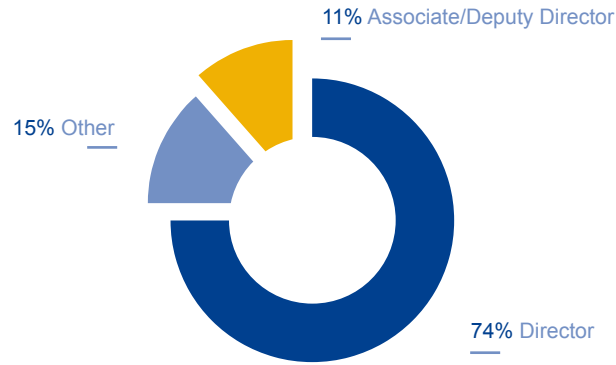
### V TYPE OF MUSEUM – THEME



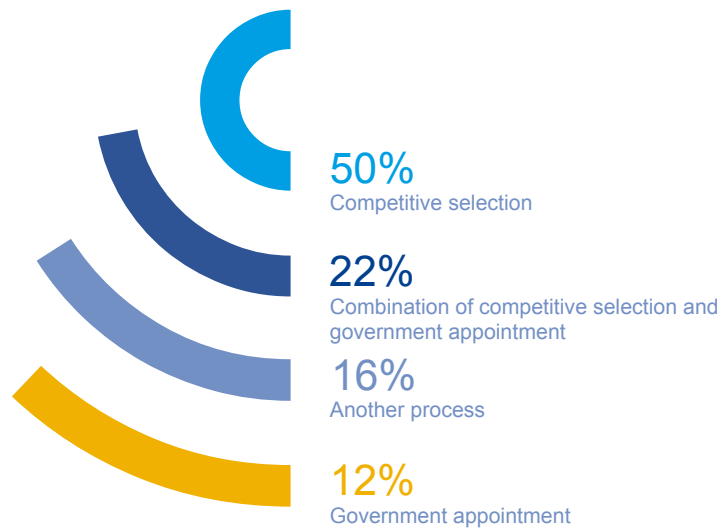
## PARTICIPANT DATA

## LEADERSHIP DATA

### VI LEADERSHIP ROLE



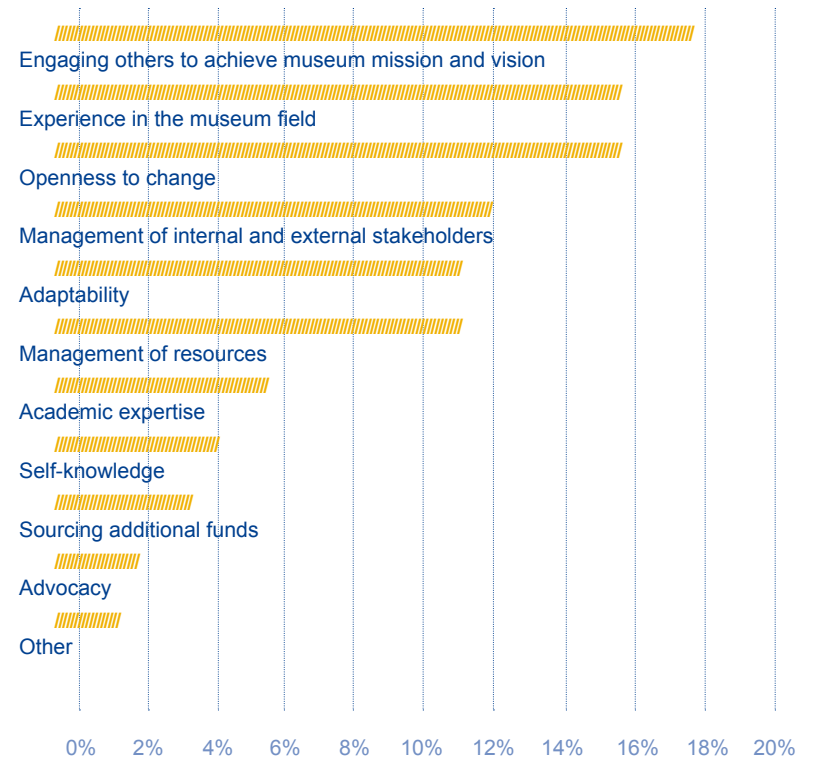
### VIII PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT



### IX SELECTION CRITERIA

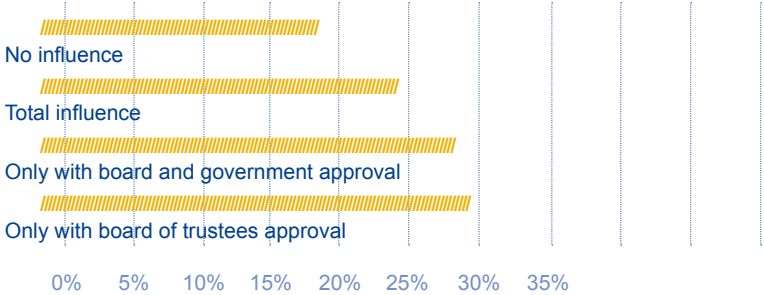


### X SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

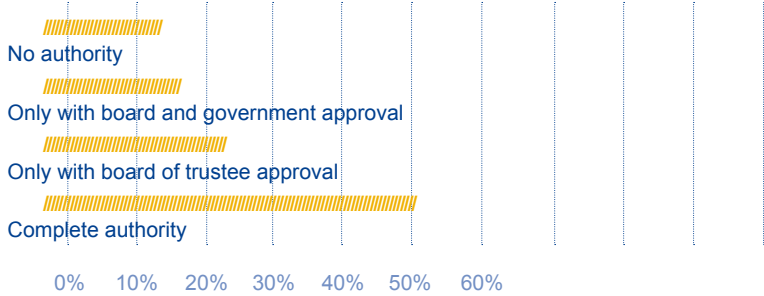


## LEADERSHIP DATA

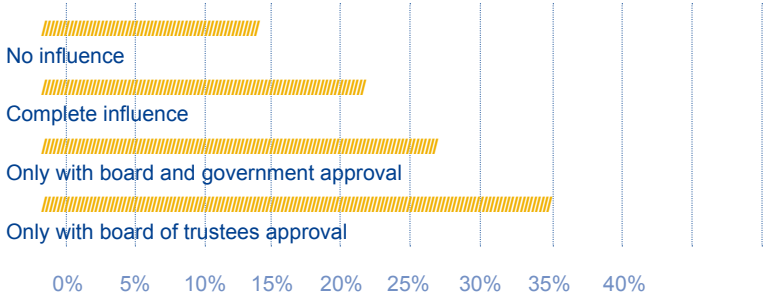
XI INFLUENCE OVER NUMBER OF JOBS IN THE MUSEUM



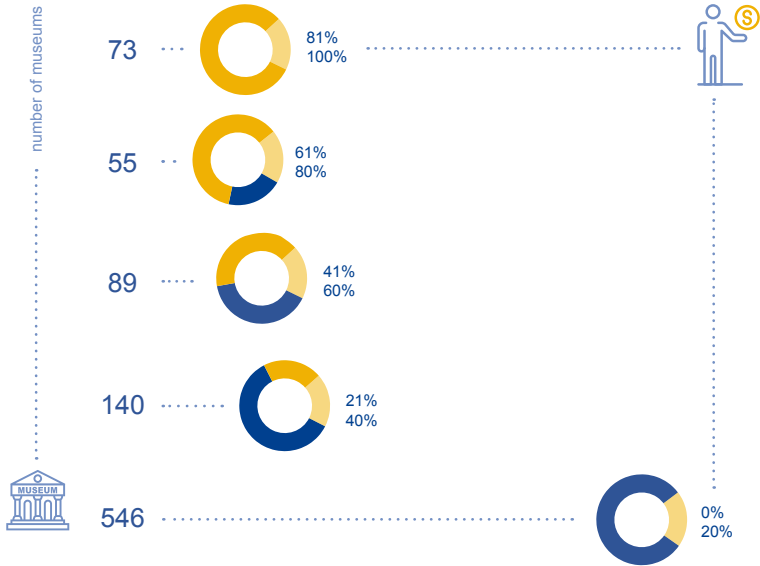
XII AUTHORITY TO APPOINT STAFF



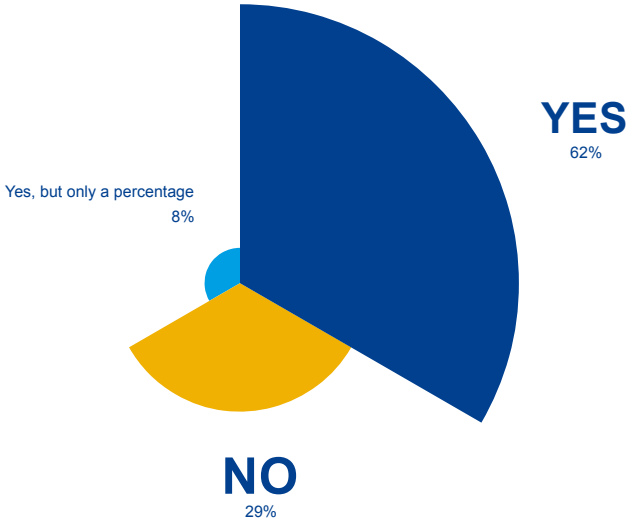
XIII INFLUENCE OVER ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



XIV PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET FROM EARNED INCOME

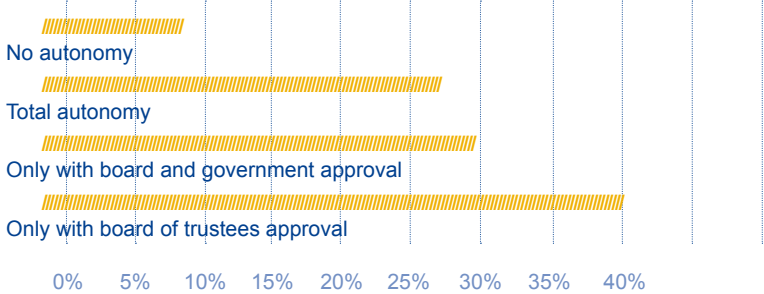


XV ABILITY TO KEEP EARNINGS

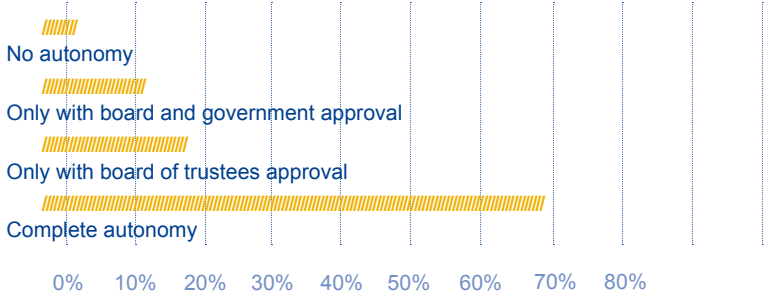




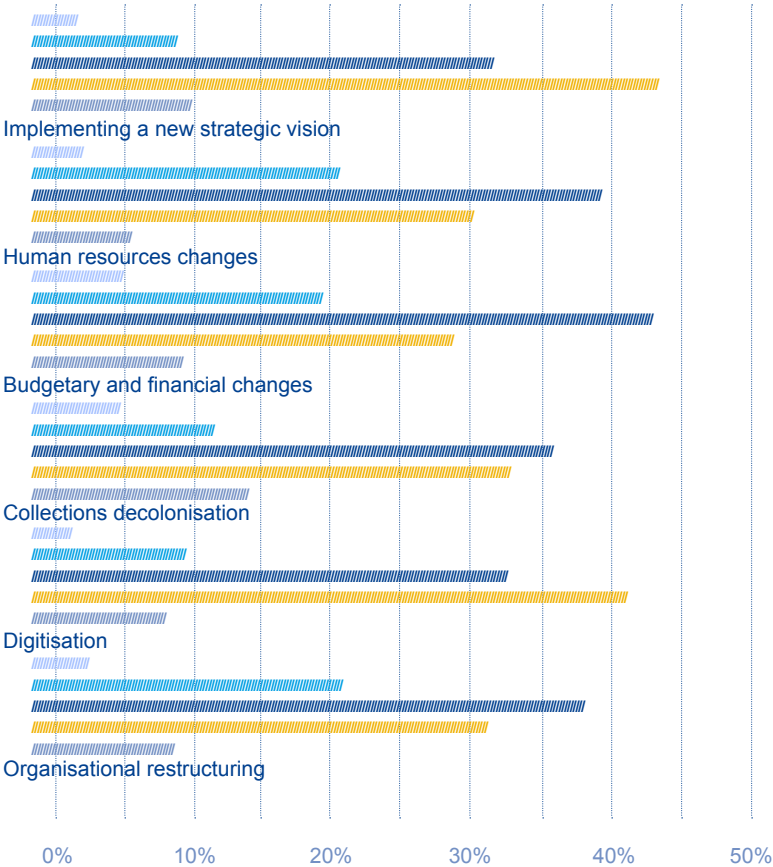
XVI INFLUENCE OVER USE OF ANNUAL BUDGET



XVII INFLUENCE OVER EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS PROGRAMME



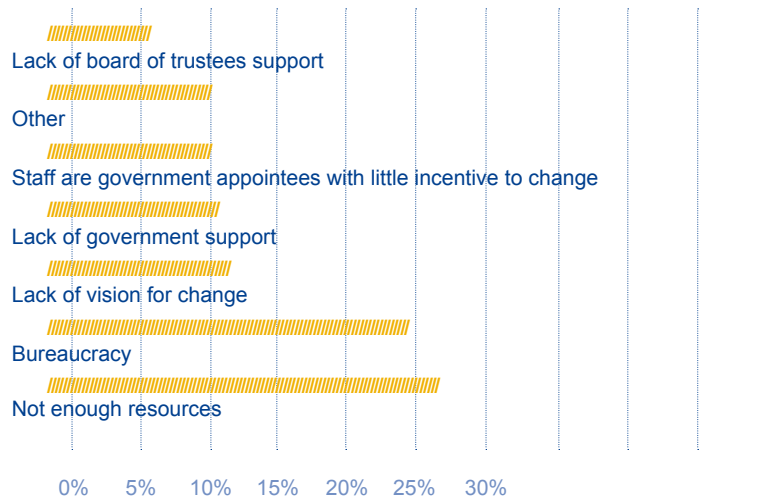
XVIII ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE



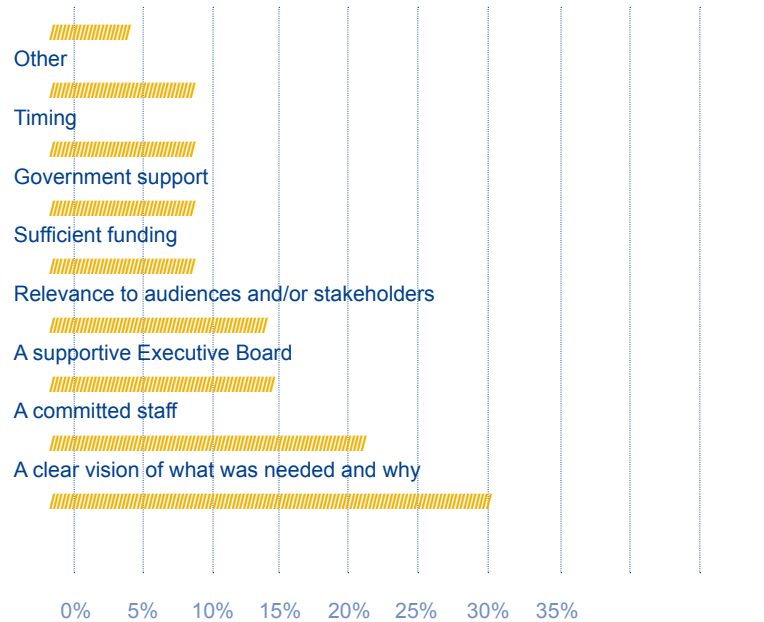
//// impossible //// Very difficult //// Not easy //// Somewhat easy //// Very easy

## SCOPE OF LEADERSHIP - AUTONOMY

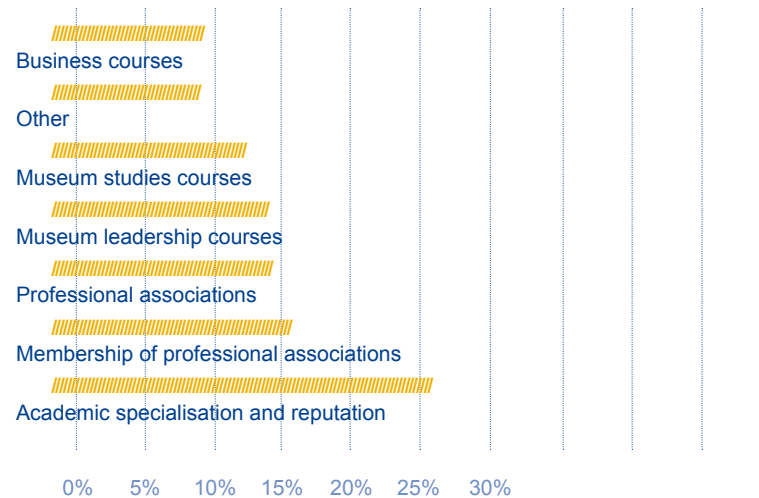
XXIX FACTORS IMPEDING IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE



XX FACTORS ENABLING IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE



XXI DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS

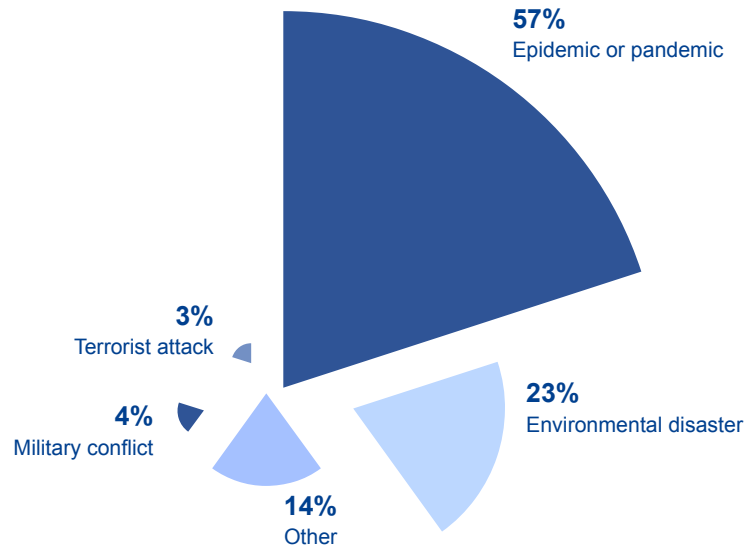


## CRISIS LEADERSHIP SKILLS

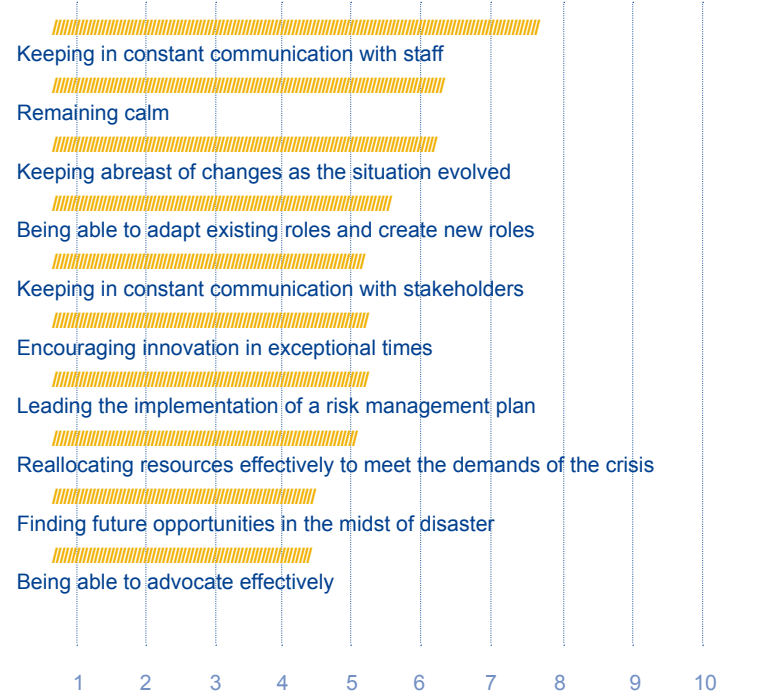
XXII EXPERIENCE OF EXTERNAL CRISIS



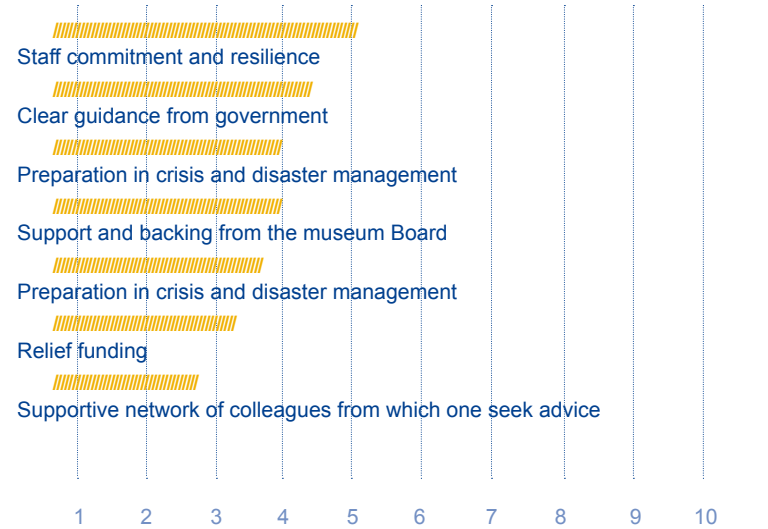
XXIII TYPES OF CRISIS FACED BY MUSEUM LEADERS



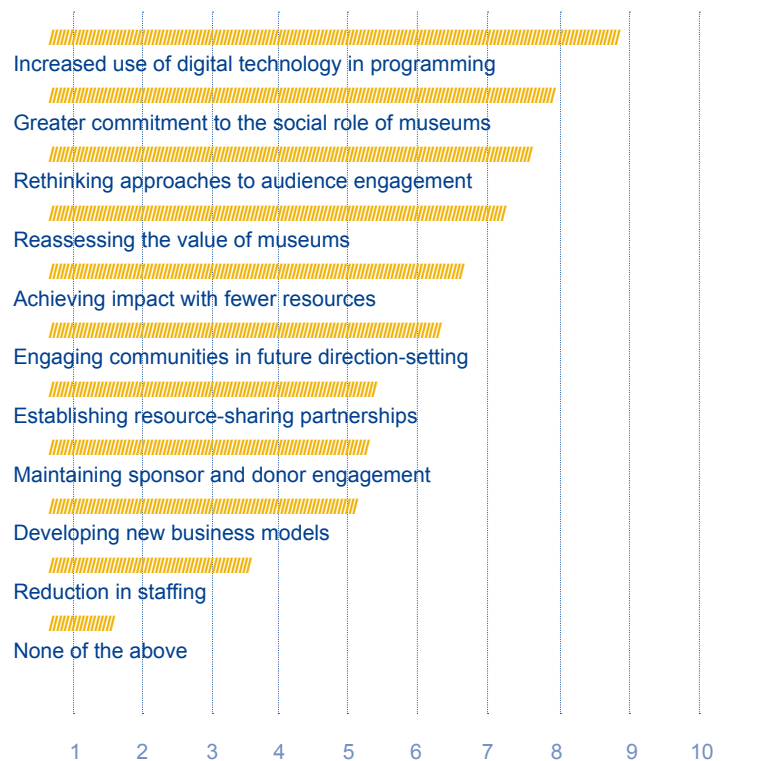
XXIV LEADERSHIP SKILLS REQUIRED TO MANAGE A CRISIS



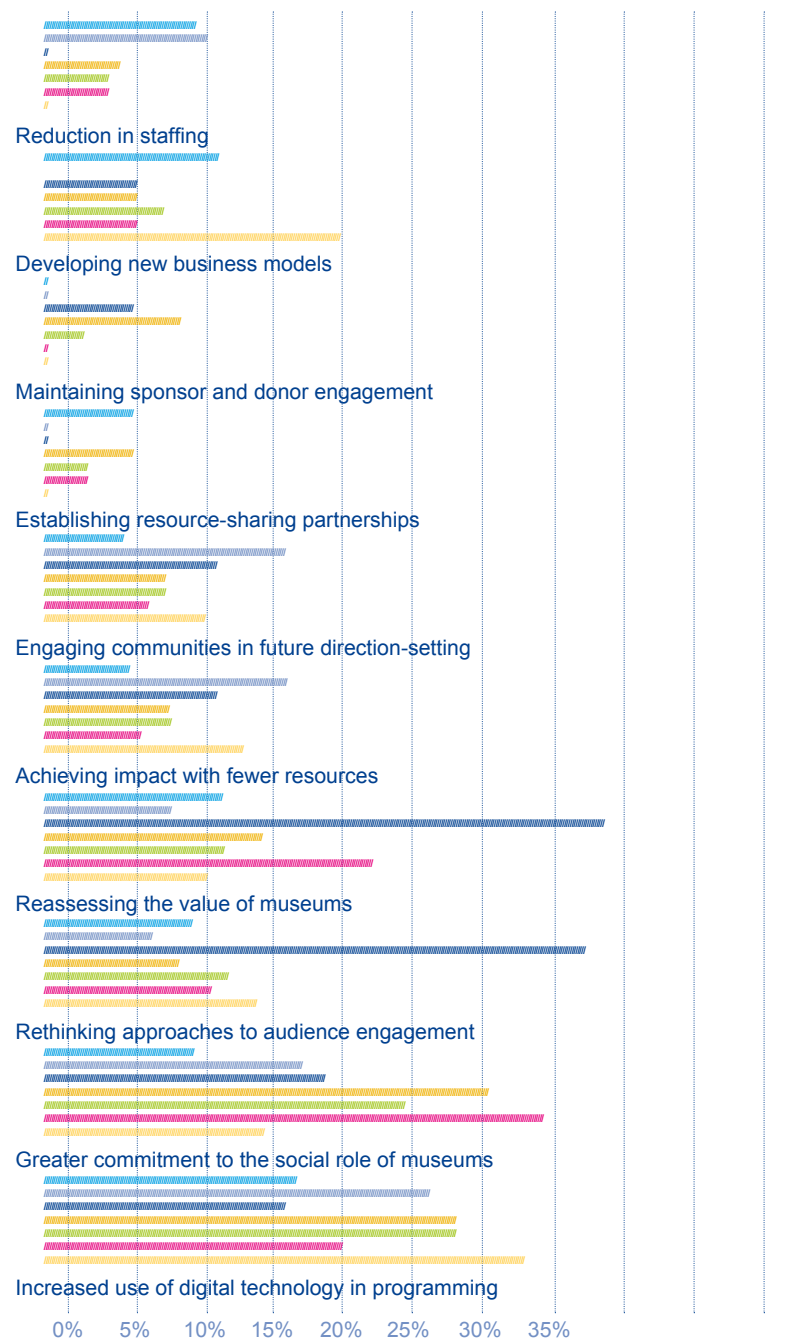
XXV SUPPORT FOR LEADERS FACING CRISES



XXVI IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON MUSEUM PRACTICE



XXVII IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON MUSEUM PRACTICE – REGIONAL ANALYSIS



//// Oceania //// Nord America //// Middle East //// Latin America //// Europe //// Asia //// Africa



XXVIII LONG-TERM IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MUSEUM LEADERS

