

Meeting Room Event

January 8th 2025, at 2 pm (Paris/Amsterdam) CET

Speaker: Dr. Kathrin Pabst

Moderator: Dr. Lina G. Tahan, Chair IC Ethics

Link: see below

"I won't be able to cope much longer"

Personal strain when working with emotionally charged topics in a professional museum setting

In 2022, a new museum definition was approved by ICOM members, marking a shift in how museums are relating to societies. The definition emphasizes also the need to address complex topics such as the treatment of minorities, repatriation, preparation for war, and the long-term consequences of conflict on descendants more properly. These subjects require museum professionals to navigate not only the strong emotions of informants, communities, and visitors but also their own emotional responses.

Studies and discussions with colleagues worldwide suggest that working with traumatized informants or visitors can result in secondary traumatization or secondary traumatic stress – especially when the professionals themselves have personal connections to the topic or are personally affected by it. Intergenerational transfer of individual and collective traumas are important aspects to be aware of. The strain may lead to long-term sick leave, burnout, or even resignation. Despite these challenges, there is currently a lack of adequate training to prepare museum professionals for the ethical and emotional dilemmas they face. Furthermore, while psychological support is sometimes available, it is not standard practice and often focuses on personal challenges rather than addressing the unique professional context of museum work.

This meeting room event will present examples of emotionally charged topics and their associated health risks for museum professionals. It will also explore potential strategies for mitigating these risks. What forms of support are needed as emotionally

complex subjects gain prominence in the museum sector? How can these needs be met effectively? These questions will guide the discussion.



Dr. Kathrin Pabst is a German ethnologist, researcher, author, and speaker who lives in Germany and Norway. She held various museum positions over the course of the last 20 years, among them the positions as Head of the Scientific Department at the Vest-Agder Museum in Norway and project leader of the EU-funded large-scale collaboration project “Identity on the Line,” a project about the long-term consequences of war and forced migration in seven different countries.

Kathrin Pabst has broad experience in both practical and theoretical sides of working

with challenging, sensitive, or taboo-related subjects, has given many keynotes and workshops on this topic and published several articles and books about museum ethics. She is a former Board member and Chair of ICOM Norway, co-founder and first Chair of ICOM’s International Committee on Ethical Dilemmas (IC Ethics), and now a member of ETHCOM, ICOM Standing Committee on Ethics.

Link to the Zoom meeting

<https://bristol-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/97554068260?pwd=MM38wJtCiVbBl1Z5wZwfTCpApZgG6A.1>

Meeting ID: 975 5406 8260

Passcode: 522598