



European Museum Academy

How are museums doing in Europe?

The European Museum Academy Reports on The Museum Temperature by the end of 2023.

The European Museum Academy is proud to present for the sixth year in a row the following more subjective inside views about how museums are doing and what the museums experience as their current challenges, be it political, financial, organisational or something else.

We all think we know something about how museums are doing in our own country, and we know that we can find statistical information produced for specific research projects and in continuous statistical series from our governments, the European Union, the Council of Europe and even UNESCO.

But what is going on beneath the numbers?

We would like to thank all our dedicated representatives across Europe who make it possible for our independent network to present this report.

Enjoy reading it!
European Museum Academy

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How were museums in Europe doing in 2023?

– an analytical summary by Henrik Zipsane

This is the sixth edition of the EMA European Museum Report. It is based on reports from the representatives of the Academy around Europe who have simply been asked: 'How were museums doing in 2023 and what is going on?' The simplicity and the broadness of the question give freedom for the representatives to interpret as they wish, and this does of course mean that the many national reports which follow are heterogeneous. This reflects the individuality of the representatives but probably also the perspective which is the natural approach to the question in their own country. What is an important issue in one country may not be highest on the agenda in another country and what is on the mind of one rapporteur may not be the same for a colleague in another country. We consider this reflects the richness in differences in the museums, and of course the rich diversity in Europe. When I in the following look closer on trends the reality of European "unity in diversity" is remarkable.

As 2022 was the first year in which the museums throughout Europe were not preoccupied all the time with the pandemic, then 2023 was the year where museums throughout Europe experienced visitor numbers which were back to pre-pandemic levels. We see this from North to South and East to West. This general impression does, however, include some interesting details. In the United Kingdom the visitor numbers in some museums are still below 2019 level, whereas in several other countries like The Netherlands, France, Spain, Iceland, and Moldova many museums saw record numbers. We don't know exactly what explains these numbers overall, but in France, Spain, and Portugal it is not least the revival of tourism that has been important. Extraordinary major exhibitions in France, The Netherlands, and Greece drew huge numbers of visitors. The general rise is indeed positive and deserved extra appreciation as it come in times of economic pressure on people's lives. The interest in museums is on the rise, and it is symptomatic that the interest in the museum card in The Netherlands and Belgium is still growing and is already a great success in Estonia, who introduced this system in 2023.

The financial situation of museums in Europe has been hard in 2023 and the forecasts for 2024 are not optimistic in most counties. In 2023 especially the inflation and high energy costs were a tough challenge in many countries and even for museums with growth in visitor numbers and growth in income from that this could not as in The Netherlands compensate the rising running costs. Higher financial support from government were eaten up by inflation in Austria. In Hungary the higher costs have deepened an already existing challenge with very low wage levels for museum staff.

The reaction from museums has differed considerably. In the Czech Republic many museums shortened their opening hours. Museums in Sweden experienced budget cuts at the same time as they are struggling with inflation and high energy prices. In Sweden there have been debates about the high rental prices which national museums pay for their buildings which are owned by the state. One state-owned museum had to close one day a week to make savings to pay an increased housing rent. Another national museum had to close after parts of the ceiling broke down due to lack of maintenance.

The financial constraints on museums have been a challenge and continue to be so, but we also see interesting lights in the tunnel in some countries. In Romania a national recovery and resilience plan has provided some extraordinary new opportunities for museums, and in Albania the challenges have paved the way for innovative solutions and opportunities for growth, especially through increased public-private partnerships.

It is also part of the financial picture that still there are a considerable number of investments completed and under way in 2023. We see that, for example, in Norway, Serbia and Cyprus for new museums, restorations, and storages. New private and public museums were opened in Spain.

The political engagement in museums shows a growing interest in several countries about what could be labelled quality assurance for museums. In Moldova a new public authority has been introduced which aims to support quality development for non-government museums. The same approach is seen in Portugal, where the action should cover the whole spectrum of museums and monuments. There we also see the introduction of the wish to stimulate more collaboration between public and private interests for the benefit of museum development and sustainability. Legislation has been passed in Luxembourg which covers the public institutions in the cultural field and is to anchor these institutions permanently within Luxembourg's cultural ecosystem, providing the previous non-profit associations and foundations with the appropriate legal, managerial, and financial framework to accomplish their public missions. The same approach has been seen in Slovenia. In Romania there were legal initiatives in 2023 for regulating the legal position of cultural workers which also covers not permanently employed museum professionals. In Cyprus similar initiatives were taken. In Denmark a report was presented to the government which put forward ideas for a proposal for a reformed museum legislation, aiming for a simplified and more transparent system for recognition and public support for museums. The positioning of museums in the organizational national landscape is strengthened in Estonia, where the museums have founded a national museum association. Malta with

no museum law is experiencing a growth in membership numbers for the national museum network which at the same time has had an increase in government financial support. The accreditation system in Iceland is still in the process of implementation. No new museums were added to the list, but many already accredited museums still work to adapt the new regulations. Many museums did and still do struggle with their owners and their understanding of their role.

In some sense the above actions aim to improve but also consolidate the position and competences of the museums. This may be very wise, as there are unfortunately also countries where it appears that there is no political will to safeguard the position of museums or their staff. In Georgia the situation from 2022 continues and The Ministry of Culture's lack of transparency obstructs communication with the museum community. Qualified staff are rarely involved in the decisions. The Union of Science, Education, and Cultural Workers advocates for dismissed professionals, securing partial success in the civil court. The ongoing protests signal unresolved issues.

One issue should be mentioned which is addressed all over Europe in museums it is the climate crisis. The Danish example is typical. The national association of museums has established The Green Academy, which runs training programmes and disseminates and produces guidelines for museums including a Green Museum Charter. But there are other strategies too. In Estonia museums continued with the introduction and use of The Green Museum Certificate which is an environmental management system. In France there has been an initiative led by several of the largest museums to take full responsibility for their impact on environment through the museum activities. Similar initiatives have been the case in countries including Sweden, Hungary, Germany, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Poland. But the theme is clearly high on agendas everywhere. In Turkey the political awareness of need to ensure protection and preservation of historical sites and museums has grown considerably as a consequence of the great disasters following the earthquake in the eastern part of the country.

The museums in Europe are constantly moving towards developing strategies and solutions for improvement. This also includes the constant strengthening of the value systems, norms and ethical standards. An interesting and important example of this is the growing attendance to themes such as repatriation of artefacts to original places from where they were once removed. This is a theme which receives growing attention throughout Europe but not least in the United Kingdom and France. But this thinking is also seen towards minorities inside different countries, Norway is an example of that, with a report in 2023 from a committee on reconciliation based on the historical

policies towards Sami people, Kven people and the Forest Finns. The report will also have an impact on museums and the repatriation of first hand Sami heritage.

Much can be said about the situation and prospects for museums in Europe by the end of 2023. Some challenges have been overcome and others have emerged. Some themes appear to have taken a top priority as we see with the climate crisis and the environmental situation. We also see that what was getting growing attendance a few years back such as digitisation now has become so imbedded in mainstream daily museum practice, that it is almost not mentioned now in the national reports.

We should end this analytical summary on a positive note. We have we experienced high visitor numbers to museums, even surpassing the pre-pandemic numbers. Interest in museums can be initiated in the most mysterious ways. In Sweden a costly television production about the history of the country has no doubt inspired many to visit their museums, and when controversy is sparked by the series it further stimulates the public interest.

Enjoy the museums in 2024!

Henrik Zipsane
European Museum Academy

COUNTRY REPORTS

ALBANIA

The year 2023 has witnessed a flourishing cultural scene in Albania, with its museums playing a pivotal role in preserving and showcasing the rich history and heritage of the region. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the state of museums in Albania throughout the year.

Visitor Engagement

Albanian museums experienced a notable increase in visitor engagement during 2023. The diverse range of exhibits and interactive displays attracted both locals and international tourists. Notable museums, such as the National Historical Museum in Tirana and the National Historical Museum “Gjergj Kastriotit Skënderbej” in Kruja, reported a significant uptick in attendance. The number of visitors was in total 342,824 surpassing the best year, that of 2019 before the pandemic. Visitors to the National Historical Museum for 2023 numbered 99,796 in total, 80% more total visitors compared to 2022. The National Museum of Recordings ‘House with Leaves’ in 2023 was visited by 48,835 visitors, 56% more visitors than in 2022. The most visitors were from Italy, the USA, France and England. 2023 marked a museum visitation record also for National Museum of Photography ‘Marubi’ in Shkodra with a total number of 17,220 visitors, 52.7% women, 47.3% men, this figure is 22% higher than in 2022. Compared to 2022, there is an increase in domestic visitors which accounts for 42% of the total visitation. Among foreign visitors to the museum, as in previous years, the first place is occupied by visitors from Italy 11.1% and France 9.8%, followed by Germany and 8.4% and the Netherlands 4%.

Cultural Exhibitions

Throughout the year, museums in Albania curated a myriad of cultural exhibitions, showcasing artefacts, artworks, and historical relics spanning various eras. These exhibitions served as a platform for promoting Albanian art, history, and cultural diversity. Collaborations with international institutions enriched the cultural tapestry and fostered global connections.

Conservation Efforts

Conservation remained a top priority for Albanian museums in 2023. There were concerted efforts to preserve and restore artefacts, manuscripts, and artworks, ensuring their longevity for future generations. Funding from the governmental

sources supported these conservation initiatives, especially in the National Museum of Mediaeval Art in Korça and the Museum 'Onufri' in Berat.

Educational Programs

Museums continued to play a crucial role in education, offering diverse programs and workshops for schools and the general public. These initiatives aimed to foster a sense of cultural pride, historical awareness, and a deeper understanding of Albania's rich past. The National Historical Museum of Albania and Museum of Leaves (Secret Surveillances during the communist dictatorship in Albania) continued with their programs, such as Little Archeologist, A Day with the Curator, and Impressions. A total of 4,707 Pupils/Students visited the Museum of Leaves in 2023, and 27 activities within the educational program: "We remember so as not to forget" where 675 students participated.

Collaborative Initiatives

Collaborations between museums, cultural institutions, and local communities flourished in 2023. Joint projects and initiatives facilitated knowledge exchange and strengthened ties within the cultural sector.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the positive trends, museums faced challenges, including budget constraints and the need for infrastructure improvements. However, these challenges also paved the way for innovative solutions and opportunities for growth, especially through increased public-private partnerships. After 43 years since its creation, the National Historical Museum will undergo museum reconstruction and reconceptualization. This will be an extraordinary operation, led by Casanova & Hernandez Architects, Holland, supported by the analysis of a team of professionals in Albanian sciences. The great interest of the local and foreign public, which is growing every year, brought the need for the biggest investment for 2024, supported by European Union funds and the state budget, which will bring a radical change in the public's approach to history and essential elements of Albanian national identity.

Technological Integration

Museums in Albania failed to embrace the technological advancements to enhance the visitor experience. The incorporation of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies in certain exhibits need investments in order to provide an immersive journey through history, appealing to a tech-savvy audience.

Conclusion

The museum landscape in Albania in 2023 reflects a vibrant and dynamic cultural scene. With a commitment to preserving heritage, embracing technology, and fostering collaborations, Albanian museums have successfully contributed to the cultural enrichment of both locals and visitors. This report serves as a snapshot of the positive trajectory of Albania's museums in 2023, laying the foundation for continued growth and excellence in the years to come.

Dorian Koçi

AUSTRIA

According to surveys, in 2023 the rising cost of living and climate change were the two main topics on people's minds in Austria. Both of these issues influence visitors in terms of the frequency with which they accept cultural offerings and visit museums. Even though the state increased the arts and culture budget by 11.3 percent to an all-time high of 620 million euros, inflation has eaten up this percentage already. Museums face the challenge of staying affordable by keeping admissions low, but they also have to deal with rising costs for operations (especially energy costs), staff, and programs.

Under the title "Luxury Museum", the annual meeting of the ARGE Inklusives Museum, which took place on September 14-16 in Graz, looked into these subjects. The following questions were discussed with experts from Austria and Germany:

- How does a visit to the museum fit into the (financial) concept?
- Are admission prices too high a barrier?
- What role do travel costs play?
- What other pricing concepts could there be?
- Are campaign days a solution?



The second major issue that concerns people in Austria is climate change and necessary measures in the area of sustainability. The motto of this year's International Museum Day was 'Museums, sustainability and well-being'. ICOM invited museum employees and visitors to share their visions for a sustainable political, social and cultural development of our society and to get to know Austria's diverse and rich museum landscape.

Keyword 'well-being' - museum as a place where people with all kinds of different backgrounds and cultures work together, but also as a place that is accessible for everyone visiting it.

The **Museums Guide inclusive** lists the wide range of Austrian museums. The online version www.museumsguide.net offers the user different search criteria, which makes finding the right museum for their needs and disability much easier than it was before. Also listed are information on barrier-free entrances, reduced admission, the availability of barrier-free toilets, tactile orientation aids, programs, and workshops, easy-read guides, audio guides, multimedia guides or listening stations, wheelchair or walker rental options, inductive listening systems, the museum's barrier-free website and much more.



Seal of quality

As part of the Austrian Museum Day on October 11 at the inatura Dornbirn, 37 museums were awarded the Museum Seal of Quality. This means that 310 museums all over Austria have now been awarded this seal of quality.

Openings and anniversaries

At the end of 2023, the Wien Museum reopened on Karlsplatz after several years of renovation and expansion.

In 2023, the Belvedere celebrated the 300th anniversary of its construction. The summer residence of Prince Eugene of Savoy was first opened in 1723. From the very beginning, it was intended as a place of art and was to remain so for the next 300 years.

The children's museum FRida & freD and the Kunsthaus in Graz also celebrated a milestone birthday. They were founded 20 years ago, when Graz was the European Capital of Culture.

Günter Brus, an important representative of Actionism, celebrated his 85th birthday. And several galleries and museums throughout Austria joined in the celebrations. Roman Grabner, the director of the Bruseum in Graz, presented his 'monographic' book *Herzeigung*, published by Walther König, which is a 624-page catalogue of the extraordinary Brus collection of the THP Private Foundation.

New appointments

There were also numerous new appointments in the museum sector in 2023.

In Graz, Marko Mele and Josef Schrammel took over the management of the Universalmuseum Joanneum. Andreja Hribernik was appointed the management of the Graz Kunsthaus. Wolfgang Muchitsch, who has left the Joanneum after 20 years, took over the management of the Landesmuseum Kärnten.

In Vienna, after a long search, the Museum of Military History found a new director in the historian Georg Hoffmann. A new artistic director is still being sought for the Kunsthalle Wien.

The art historian and former chief curator of the Belvedere, Harald Krejci, will take over the management of the Museum der Moderne Salzburg.

Nina Ansperger took over as artistic and scientific director of the museum Gugging in Klosterneuburg, succeeding museum founder Johann Feilacher.

Nikola Köhler-Kroath

BELGIUM

The Flemish Museum Network is an informal network of professionals working in museums and umbrella heritage organizations in Flanders. FARO, the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage, facilitates and supports this network. Chair is Patrick Allegaert, former artistic director of the Guislain Museum in Ghent.

The Flemish Museum Network was established 11 years ago. It started from a small network of museum directors in Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges, and expanded gradually. Since the pandemic in 2020, the Flemish Museum Network has been growing rapidly. Currently, nearly 50 museums participate in the XL meetings. There is a very broad representation of the Flemish museums sector (ca. 85%). This strong involvement of the museums underscores the importance of this consultation and ensures its future role. The participants in the consultation belong to the management level of museums (general director, business director, artistic director, communication manager). The goal is to exchange experiences, insights, and Q&A. During these meetings shared policies and museological issues, challenges and opportunities for collaboration are discussed. In 2023 the Flemish Museum Network organised eight meetings, of which seven were XL online meetings, with all museums recognised by the Flemish community (both basic recognition, supra-local and national recognition). These meetings were attended by over 50 museums. The emphasis in these digital meetings was on sharing information. In addition, there was one IRL meeting just with the national museums.

All meetings were supported substantively and methodically by FARO, the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage. As good in terms of deepening the content of the operation as in terms of supporting the operation via reporting, but via offering meeting infrastructure, FARO gave support highly appreciated by all members. It is not the intention to revisit all the topics that were discussed, we cite the most important ones.

1.1 Policy

For museums recognised by Flanders, 2023 was dominated by a new policy period for cultural heritage (2024-2028). On 15 January 2023, museums at the national and supralocal level had to submit their strategy plans for the next five years and a period of assessment and allocation of grant amounts for the new policy period began.

The museums each make a dossier with their quantified policy choices and plans. But the Flemish Museum Network is the place where more generic positions are determined, where strategies for influencing policy are worked out, where joint

communication in this regard is decided upon. The main accents of this consultation were:

- o large additional cost for all museums in terms of energy, inflation
- o rising costs in the organisation of exhibitions (transport, insurance, design and construction, ...)
- o important necessary approach to e.g. digitisation
- o strengthening international presence

Through the Flemish Museum Network, the museums expressed to the Flemish government the absolute necessity to significantly increase the budget for museums. In the previous policy period, an impetus to increase was formulated given a large historical deficit compared to other arts organisations (performing arts, for example). But for the new policy period, a sensitive increase in the budget is once again imminent. To this end, the Flemish Museum Network consulted with the representative of the Cultural Heritage Consultation (OCE) and prepared positions that are important for all organisations within cultural heritage (museums, archives, heritage libraries, etc.). In addition, the Flemish Museum Network also prepared its own positions and discussed them with the policy level - (Flemish government, Flemish parliament, culture commission, democratic political parties) - as well with the officials of the Department of Culture. In October 2023 the Flemish government decided to allocate 25 million euros extra to the domain of cultural heritage, including museums, for the policy period 2024-28.

1.2 Museological themes

1.2.1 Attention to digitisation

There is a rapidly growing awareness that Flemish museums still need to take big steps in this area. To achieve digital transformation in the cultural heritage sector, the Flemish government is taking a directive role and working on a strategic policy across the boundaries of sub-sectors and specific target groups. The Flemish Museum Network had a meeting with memo on digital databases.

1.2.2 ICOM

The Flemish Museum Network discussed in a working group the translation of the new ICOM museum definition into Dutch together with colleagues from The Netherlands. Also, in a separate working group the Code of Ethics of ICOM was discussed.

1.2.3 External

The successful growth of the Belgian Museumpassmusées was a structural topic at the meetings of the Flemish Museum Network (cf. infra). The number of museums participating is trending (+ 240 museums) as well as the number of pass holders (almost 200.000). The initiative of the Flemish Government regarding a digital Flemish museum was followed up as well. The digital museum will be launched March 2024. The Flemish Museum Network maintains in close consultation with the heritage sector at large (via the interest group OCE) and with SARC (the strategic advisory body for culture of the Flemish Community).

2 OCE

The Interest Group for Cultural Heritage (OCE) is the advocate of and for cultural heritage in Flanders and Brussels. It provides a platform where the various sub-sectors (archives, museums, national service providers, heritage libraries, heritage cells and the intangible heritage organisation) meet, share policy information and set up actions to support the cultural heritage field.

OCE set out to renew itself. A transition towards a more member driven form has been taking place in 2022-2023. At the same time, OCE has been focussed on the rewriting of the legislation concerning cultural heritage in Flanders.

More information via: <https://overlegcultureelerfgoed.be/>.

3 Museumpassmusées

Museumpassmusées is the largest museum pass in Belgium. Pass holders get one-year access to all participating Belgian museums. That means visiting the permanent exhibitions of more than 241 museums for free. One can also visit temporary exhibitions for free or at a substantial discount.

In 2023 the museum pass generated 972.845 museum visits (2022: 555.194) and €5,8 million was distributed to the museums (2022: €3,1 million). The portfolio now includes 241 participating museums (2022: 225). We ended 2023 with 176.615 active passholders (2022: 124.927). In total 181.049 museum passes were sold (2022: 126.800). 2023 started with “The Story of Flanders”, a 10-week series on TV, which increased the interest in museums significantly. Spring and summer showed a sharp rise in museum visits. Autumn 2023 was marked by top exhibitions on ‘Flemish masterpieces’, the Europalia-Festival Georgia, the Art Nouveau-Year in Brussels, etc. A massive boost of museum pass sales and visitors by passholders followed. The App, used by 73% of the passholders, was further developed. It allows interaction, encouraging more visits. The mission “directing more visitors to the museums” is fulfilled.

More information via: <https://www.museumpassmusees.be/>.

4 Flemish Virtual Museum

In 2022, the team behind the Flemish Virtual Museum designed a brand identity for the virtual

museum. In 2023 preparations have been in full swing to launch the virtual museum in five Flemish provinces from mid-March 2024, followed by a communication and promotion campaign to different target groups until the end of the year.

More information via: <https://doemee.museumvanvlaanderen.be/>.

5 New developments & exhibitions

In 2023 some major new developments, reopenings as well as unique exhibitions, took place in Belgium. To name just a few:

- From 2023 onwards, seven panels of 'The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb' by the Van Eyck brothers (more commonly known as the Ghent Altarpiece) are restored in the heart of the MSK museum in Ghent. One could already follow the restoration campaign from 2012 to 2019. Now, during the week, one can see the restorers of the Royal Institute of Art Heritage (KIK) at work live, in the studio behind glass. During the weekend, the panels are on display.

www.mskgent.be/tentoonstellingen/restauratie-lam-gods - 2023 was the year of art nouveau in Brussels. In 1893, architect Victor Horta put the finishing touches to the Tasselhuis, the starting point of art nouveau in Brussels. 130 years later, Brussels is seizing this anniversary to put art nouveau in the spotlight. Numerous initiatives took place throughout the Brussels Region: site visits, exhibitions, lectures, publications, workshops, crafts, guided city tours, etc. Moreover, two exceptional venues permanently opened their doors to the public: the Maison Hannon and the LAB-AN & van Eetvelde Hotel. www.visit.brussels/fr/visiteurs/agenda/bruxelles--capitale-de-l-art-nouveau.html

- Musea Brugge was recognised as a museum of international standing by the Flemish government in 2022. With the new exhibition hall BRUSK, the research centre BRON, the renovation of the Groeninge Museum and the construction of a new, green art site in the middle of the Bruges Museum Quarter, Musea Brugge is currently investing in an innovative, contemporary art policy with an impact far beyond the national borders.

www.musea Brugge.be

- In 2023 museum Kasteel van Gaasbeek reopened after an extensive restoration of the castle and the addition of a new entrance building. www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be - Autumn 2023, museum M in Leuven presented a major retrospective on Dieric Bouts as part of the 'New Horizons | Dieric Bouts Festival'. Never before have so many works by the Flemish Master come together in his hometown. Moreover, visitors were

treated on new perspective on his work through a radical confrontation with today's visual culture. The exhibition was sold out. www.mleuven.be/programma/dieric-bouts

Hilde Schoefs

BULGARIA

In 2023, almost all museums in Bulgaria will reach visitor levels from 2019, and some museums will exceed them. However, the visitor situation is dynamic and requires more effort to attract them.

In 2023, the politics of the Association of Bulgarian Museums resembled that of a trade union, and the main focus of its activity was placed on talks with political figures to secure better state subsidy for museums in the 2024 budget. At the moment, success is too shaky, because the Ministry of Finance published an analysis of museum activity, from which it became clear that 22% of regional museums in our country for 2022 do not have an exhibition and do not report activity with audiences. Such results are desperate and startling, which is why a working group was formed between the Ministry of Culture, ICOM - Bulgaria and the Association of Bulgarian Museums to develop criteria for evaluating the activities of museums tied to funding. This type of attestation will be a response to the harsh proposal of the Ministry of Finance, which wants to support only active museum institutions and not all those that only "preserve cultural heritage".

The main contribution to the implementation of museum policies again came from the Ministry of Culture, which opened programs for conservation and restoration, as well as for the design of new expositions. The museums were active again and massively took advantage of the opportunity provided, but this time too their initiatives did not have a particularly great result in terms of attracting new audiences. Educational programs for adolescents are now common in most museums, but programs for adults are not yet available. This undoubtedly hinders the attraction of new audiences, as well as participation in museum activities.

Since 2009, a program for active exchange of exhibitions and better mobility of the collections has been in force, which after the pandemic has largely subsided. Nevertheless, as one of the most important cultural events in the country for 2023 is the exhibition *Trebenishte. 105 years since the opening of the necropolis 1918 - 2023*, of the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia, which collected artefacts from North Macedonia and Serbia. Another exhibition which periodically receives public light because of its inspiring example of a new reading of the common history of the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe in the distant past is *The First Kings of Europe*, shown during the year at the Field Museum, Chicago.

During the year, other opportunities for financing museum activities and for the renovation of buildings and exhibitions were agreed, which are tied to The next-generation EU Recovery and Resilience Plan, supported by the European Commission.

The year's planned digitization of museum exhibits shared on a common platform has not yet begun.

The dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia became an important public event, which to a certain extent divided the society into pro-European oriented and those subject to Putin's propaganda. The dismantling has an important charge for the museum community, as it will reflect on the activities of museums and encourage them to create expositions about the time of communism, which we currently lack.

The analysis for 2023 shows that museums work for themselves, find it difficult to find support and rarely seek partners. This kind of (self)isolation is caused by a lack of clear goals and a vision for development, by the distancing of the municipal authorities from funding the museums, by a lack of a critical position regarding the created cultural product. Divided into the Premier League and the Second Division (according to football terminology), most of the museums are wandering in a dead end, and even the new definition of a museum is not a stimulus for them.

Nikolay Nenov

CROATIA

In Croatia, 2023 was also defined - for the fourth year in a row - by the restoration of a number of museums damaged in the 2020 earthquake. This applies primarily to a number of national-level museums in Zagreb, but also to many local museums, which are in the process of renovation. Some of the museums have renovated their buildings and are due for interior decoration. Interestingly, a quarter of the museum is at the same time under renovation and consequently working on new permanent exhibitions. Of the 22 museums under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Media, as many as 15 are currently in one of the stages of preparatory activities and creation of new permanent exhibitions, prompted by a large number of reconstruction projects after the earthquake, energy projects or other projects co-financed from European Union funds.

New exhibitions were opened last year by the Drniš City Museum and the Museum Collection of Kastavština. The Archaeological Museum of Istria completed the renovation of the Little Roman Theatre, Hvar got a Vinegrowing museum in the renovated building of the old school in Pitve, and on the island of Zlarin the Croatian coral centre was opened. In Korčula, within the City Museum of Korčula, the Marko Polo Center was recently opened - an exhibition that introduces visitors to the life of the world-famous explorer and travel writer. One of the theories is that Marco Polo was born on the island of Korčula. Intangible cultural heritage in 2023 was also the topic of new museum exhibitions. In Pleternica (Slavonia), the Bećarac Museum was opened in a new building designed for this purpose. The museum is dedicated to extremely popular traditional vocal-instrumental music.

Of the many exhibitions, it is worth highlighting two that have aroused great interest. One is a retrospective of the famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović in the Klovićevi dvori in Zagreb.

In the second exhibition, 'Faces of Hunger', the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb and the Institute of Ethnology opened the topic of hunger, put a series of difficult questions and talked about eating disorders. It is one of the exhibitions that refers to the critical review of today's culture, and also touches on the so-called 'difficult heritage'. It was precisely on such heritage that Croatian museum staff began to work more intensively researching the provenance and the ownership of objects of art for which there is a well-founded suspicion that they were taken from the Jews during the Second World War and later, as well as from all those who found themselves targeted by the totalitarian government(s).

Women in Croatia were somewhat more visible in 2023, to use the title of the Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition created in collaboration with the Dubrovnik Art Gallery, the Osijek Museum of Fine Arts, the Split Art Gallery and the Rijeka Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art as an overview of the contemporary work of female artists. The aim was to emphasize the necessity of more equal visibility and representation of female authors both in museum programs and in their collections. One visitor center, the one in Malinska, called the Interpretative Center of Maritime Heritage DUBoak, received the ŽIVA award given by the Forum of Slavic Cultures for the best Heritage Site.

Lidija Nikočević

CYPRUS

Cyprus may be a small island at the far eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, but it has played an important role as a stopover and pathway for culture and the arts between East and West since ancient times.

In many respects, 2023 was an interesting year for museums in Cyprus, as well as the arts in general. The newly established Deputy Ministry of Culture has been working closely with state and private museums, cultural organisations and independent artists to promote Cypriot culture and its contemporary aspects, encouraging the establishment of European networks and international partnerships.

There is an apparent need for more museums and cultural spaces in Cyprus, and the government, as well as foundations and private collections, are attempting to adapt to the new museological standards set in many nations around the world.

Construction of the most anticipated cultural project in Cyprus, the new Archaeological Museum in Nicosia, at an estimated cost of €121.3 million, is progressing rapidly, and it will be open in four years. The Museum will focus on the rich history of Cyprus and will consist of three buildings, each of which will house permanent and temporary exhibitions, divided into three concepts: culture, the environment and the sea.

An additional project of the Government of Cyprus that opened its doors recently, after many years of continual efforts, is the Costas Argyrou Museum Foundation, located in Mazotos, on the outskirts of Larnaca. Featuring works by Costas Argyrou, the first recognised Cypriot naive sculptor, the Museum is expected to become a local and regional hub hosting temporary exhibitions, educational programmes and events.

Furthermore, from June 2023 Cypriots and visitors to the island will have the opportunity to visit the largest observatory in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Tamassos and Orinis Planetarium, located on the outskirts of Nicosia, aims to expose people of all ages to the wonders and mysteries of science. As one of Cyprus's most cutting-edge astrotourism attractions and a place where science education and entertainment can be combined, the facility boasts innovative technologies and interactive spaces.

Throughout 2023 friends of the arts also had the opportunity to visit and experience a variety of exhibitions and cultural events, a selection of which is mentioned below.

In collaboration with the Benaki Museum and the Centre for Asia Minor Studies in Athens, Greece, the A. G. Leventis Gallery co-organised and hosted part of the monumental exhibition *Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday – Catastrophe – Displacement – Rebirth*. The exhibition highlighted the culture and unfolded the chronicle of Hellenism in Asia Minor. It was enriched with heirlooms and testimonies from the refugees who settled and started a new life in Cyprus and featured more than 500 exhibits and photographs.

An exhibition entitled *On the Field: Football – History – Nicosia* was organised by the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia. During this temporary exhibition, the history of football in Cyprus was revealed, with the city of Nicosia at its core, featuring rich documentation and exhibits loaned by government organisations, private collectors, football players and sports clubs.

The Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre [NiMAC] and the Pierides Foundation organised the Nicosia Open Up Festival for the first time. It featured an art exhibition, performances, an open discussion, lectures, video installations, a variety of art activities, music, screenings, street parties, culinary events and workshops.

Finally, the House of Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios in Nicosia hosted the exhibition *Seeing through Melancholia: Transcultural Melancholias / Hüzün in the Eastern Mediterranean*, which brought together contemporary artists from Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

CZECH REPUBLIC

In 2023, Czech museums continued in their work and development. The echoes of the 26th ICOM General Conference Prague 2022 were fading away. ICOM Czech Republic closed the professional office after the event was billed in April 2023.

Progress in the field of museums could be observed mainly in regional organizations that completed a number of grant projects and opened renovated or newly constructed buildings to the public. Several remarkable exhibition projects were also created.

It is already a tradition in Czech museum institutions that great attention is paid to education. Visitors had the opportunity to visit exhibitions not only individually, but also in groups for guided tours, workshops, school groups attended educational programs. But museums also had to cope with the effects of the energy crisis, which affected all parts of society. The sharp rise in prices and high inflation has forced many museums to reassess their activities. Museums are debating and will no doubt in the future be increasingly inclined to focus on quality instead of quantity. Some have already started to abandon the model of exhibitions that last 3-4 months and extend their duration to 5-6 months. This approach saves human resources, allows you to focus on higher quality processing and also more efficient work with the finished exhibition product, such as promotion, creation of educational programs for schools, etc.

In January 2024, not all statistical surveys are closed yet, but hopefully the number of visitors to the museums will increase. In 2022, 11,166,000 visitors came to museums and galleries in the Czech Republic. We hope the numbers of 2023 will be even higher.

RECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL BUILDINGS FOR CULTURAL PURPOSES

Automatic mills in Pardubice

The iconic building of automatic mills in the city of Pardubice underwent a renovation in 2019-2023, which enabled its preservation for future generations, breathed new life into it and transformed it into a modern cultural and social district.

The construction of the mill building was designed by one of the most famous Czech architect Josef Gočár and was completed in 1909-1910. Gočár was inspired by the Babylonian Ishtar Gate when designing it. The main mill hall is as tall as a seven-storey building and its façade is decorated with distinctive Art Deco elements.

The reconstruction took place in cooperation with the Pardubice Region, the city of Pardubice and a private investor Lukáš Smetana. Most important Czech architects participated in the project of the reconstruction: Zdeněk Balík, Petr Všečetka, Josef Pleskot and Jan Šépka, who is the author of the only new building in the area.

Currently, there are several cultural institutions located in Automatic Mills. The regional East Bohemian Gallery found its new headquarters here. With the change of location, it changed its name to Gočár's Gallery, out of respect for the original author of the buildings and also as a reference to its own profile – a significant part of the gallery's activities is devoted to the history of architecture. The city gallery GAMPA, focused on contemporary art, also moved into the mills. The third is the newly established SPHERE, which is an organization of informal and interest-based education, creates space for creativity, discovering new contexts, strengthens responsibility and contributes to sustainable development. SILO is a multifunctional conference and art space, a background for the synergy of all activities in the area. The area of automatic mills was opened to the public in September 2023.

<https://automatickemlyny.eu/>

EPO1 – gallery of contemporary art

Behind the abbreviation EPO1 is the name Elektrárna Poříčí Nr. 1 (Power Station Poříčí). The monumental brick building of the power plant from 1914 served its purpose until 1970. Energy returned to the site again in 2020, when the Kasper family viewed the building and decided to convert it into a contemporary art gallery and asked for the project of the reconstruction architectural Atelier Tsunami.

EPO1 can be found on the outskirts of the town of Trutnov in northeastern Bohemia, exactly five kilometres from the border with Poland, in an area where few would look for such a distinctive intellectual concept focused on art. It brings new dimension and new quality not only to the city of Trutnov, but to the whole region. Within the Czech Republic, the project is also exceptional in that it is carried out by private individuals and was not financed from subsidies and grants, but exclusively from the revenues of their company Kasper, which is one of the sought-after construction companies specializing in sustainable architecture, wooden supporting structures for family houses, commercial buildings, civil amenities and atypical projects, as well as engineering production.

The contemporary art center EPO1 has an exhibition area of 3,400 square meters. The building offers indoor exhibition areas, an open-air exhibition, residential accommodation for artists, a café and an administrative part. The connection with the production of the company Kasper, located in other buildings of the complex, allows artists to realize their visions directly on the spot, during the residency. The projects are always thematically linked to the phenomenon of energy – Fresh Power supports young artists, Power for Space focuses on placing art in public space, Volume – the acoustic dimension in contemporary art.

The contemporary art gallery EPO1 was inaugurated to the public in April 2023.

<https://www.epo1.cz/en/the-gallery/>

Municipal Museum in Jaroměř

The town of Jaroměř is also located in Eastern Bohemia, known primarily for its proximity to the late Baroque military fortress of Josefov, named after Emperor Joseph II. Few would look for one of the top examples of modernist architecture in this city. At the same time as the Automatic Mills were established in Pardubice, the architect Josef Gočár also worked on the project of the Wenke department store in Jaroměř (1909-1911). The unique building is the first building in Europe with a suspended glass façade. The interior spaces were connected by a generous circular gallery with a great glass chandelier, the black and white colouring keeps pace with the realizations of Josef Hoffmann in Vienna. The investor was a company for the production and sale of shell goods and haberdashery. Before the Second World War, the company went bankrupt and from 1947 the building was used for museum purposes. In 2020, the reconstruction of the building, which was in a very bad state, began.

Part of the reconstruction is the expansion of the exhibition spaces and spaces for the public (the previously unused courtyard and terrace). Part of the renovation was the construction of a permanent exhibition dedicated to the history of the house and the Wenke company. The exhibition was designed for use by children, the emphasis was on educational elements and activities (e.g. a 'seashell' workshop). A hall dedicated to the history of the company's automotive section is also designed educationally. In addition to the permanent exhibition, the museum now has three exhibition spaces at its disposal, enabling simultaneous temporary exhibitions. Lectures are now held in the attic hall (a previously unused floor). The author of the architectural plan for both the construction and exhibition parts is academician architect David Vávra and his team.

<https://muzeumjaromer.cz/en/>

PLACE OF MEMORY RECOVERY

Ploština – memorial to the victims of World War II

In the forests and hills of the eastern part of the Czech Republic, there is a place called Ploština. Until 1945 there was a beekeeping settlement in which several dozen people lived. On April 19, 1945, the settlement was burned down by the German occupiers and its inhabitants executed for supporting partisans. In 1946 and 1947 new houses were built for the survivors of the victims, chapels in memory of the victims of the tragedy, in 1975 the Monument to the anti-fascist resistance in Ploština was realized. In 1999, the monument was enlisted as the National Cultural Monument. The memorial is managed by the Museum of Southeast Moravia in Zlín.

In 2020-2023, a demanding reconstruction of the entire area took place, the aim of which was to transform the site of a tragedy from World War II into a living museum centre and at the same time to commemorate the 28 murdered with dignity. The memorial complex consists of three buildings after the reconstruction. In particular, it is a completely new visitor centre building, whose oval shape, green roof and sensitive

setting in the sloping terrain respects the character and beauty of the local Wallachian landscape. Inside the interactive audiovisual exhibition *The Tragedy on the Plain* brings visitors closer to the history and way of life of Wallachian horsemen. The narrative continues until an ominous turning point in the form of the events of April 19, 1945.

One of the local houses was adapted for museum purposes by the Museum of Southeastern Moravia in Zlín. The exposition installed in it was devoted to the history of the anti-fascist resistance in the Zlín district. Through a large number of period documents and photographs, he tries to cover this issue as completely as possible. Part of the exhibition is devoted to the persecution of the civilian population, foreign resistance in the East and West, as well as Nazi prisons and concentration camps and victims of racial persecution. The conclusion of the exhibition is information about the liberation struggles in the district.

The memorial was opened to the public in April 2023.

<https://www.muzeum-zlin.cz/nkp-plostina-stranka>

EXHIBITIONS – NEW CHALLENGES

Made by Fire – Moravian Gallery

In 2023, the Moravian Gallery realized a unique project called *Made by Fire*. Firstly it was introduced in April 2023 as part of the Triennale Milano in Italy, then it was presented as part of the largest design show in the Czech Republic, Designblok in October 2023, and at the end of the year brought it to its headquarters in Brno, and was part of the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the oldest museum of applied arts in the Czech Republic, which today is part of the Moravian Gallery in November 2023.

The project focuses on the strength and fragility of Czech glass and porcelain in the fire test. The unique exhibition project of the Moravian Gallery in Brno, in cooperation with the Prague international design festival Designblok, presents the best of Czech glass, porcelain and ceramics against the backdrop of major social and environmental events of today. The *Made by Fire* project thematizes the post-digital era, which on the one hand is represented by environmental strategies, and on the other hand, it is very difficult to balance the boundary between not very energy-intensive production, sustainability and functionality at the same time. The appeal of the project visibly points to the political urgency of the message, the consequences of which, however, are entirely dependent on specific decisions, on which the example of the state of Czech glass and porcelain can be observed at the same time. Their destinies thus become model examples that can be followed by analogy within the global economy as well. The exhibition can be visited until August 31, 2024.

<https://moravska-galerie.cz/vystavy/made-by-fire-4/>

Martina Lehmannová

DENMARK

2023 was generally a good year for Danish museums. There was a growth in visitor numbers, a political focus on the task and possibilities for museums and a continuous focus on sustainability.

Visitors and new openings

In 2023 the visitors came back to the Danish museums. In a survey among Danish museums, half of them answered that they experienced an increase of more than 10 percent compared to 2022, and few experienced a decrease (<https://www.dkmuseer.dk/nyheder/museernes-besoegstal-2023-et-godt-aar-for-de-fleste/>).

During the year a number of new or rebuilt museums also opened: The museum for the Danish composer Carl Nielsen reopened in his birth town of Odense (<https://museumodense.dk/carl-nielsen-museet/>). After many years of planning, Nordjyske Museum opened Cold War Museum REGAN Vest, which is a secret bunker the Danish government and monarch would flee to in case of a nuclear war (<https://nordjyskemuseer.dk/en/u/cold-war-museum-regan-vest/>) and in Copenhagen the museum of communication Enigma reopened in a new setting (<https://www.enigma.dk/>). Other opening or mayor permanent additions were the opening of a 2014 street and the Danish Cartoonist Museum in Den Gamle By (<https://www.dengamleby.dk/>), the reopening of Thisted Museum (<http://museumthy.dk/afdelinger/thisted.aspx>) and the reopening of Museum Ovarthaci, which tells the story of the Danish Brut Art artist and psychiatric patient Ovarthaci (<https://www.ovarthaci.dk/>).

Last year a new private museum also opened. It was the Classic Car House, with a major private collection of classic cars and also an unusual initiative where a museum section is combined with a 'car hotel' where private persons can exhibit their classic cars and a company that sells vintage cars (<https://www.classicarhouse.dk/en/home/>)

Political focus and analysis

In the end of 2022, a national cultural analysis institute (Kulturens Analyseinstitut) was established through a government grant. Last year the institute worked with the

cultural sector including museums and some of their first mayor task was to look at cultural initiatives dealing with volunteering, youth, and wellbeing.

The societal role of museums has also been an outspoken element in the new Danish government's National Reform Programme. In 2023, the Finance Act allocated more funds to the museum sector and initiated the process of a museum reform that has the aim to change the distribution of state funds to the many Danish state-recognized museums. A ministerially appointed working group presented their recommendations in the summer and since then there has been a debate among museums and politicians on the subject. A legislative proposal is expected to be presented in early 2024 and a new law is expected to be passed during the year.

Sustainability

In 2023 there has in the museums sector been a focus on sustainability in different ways. One of the few possibilities of applying for extra grants at the Agency of Culture was an initiative which resulted in several projects all targeting improving sustainability in the sector. 2023 was also the first year the Green Academy of Museums was functioning. The academy is based in the Association of Danish Museums and has initiated a mapping of the status and challenges of museums in relation to the green transition. They also create training programs and guidelines for museums, including formulating the Museum's green Charter.

Martin Brandt Djupdræt

ESTONIA

General

According to Statistics Estonia, there are 170 museums in Estonia in 227 locations, where approximately 7.1 million museum objects are preserved. The administrative area of the Ministry of Culture includes seven state museums and 13 foundations. There are mostly site museums (85) and theme museums (67), followed by archaeology and history museums (41) in Estonia.

Visits

After the pandemic, there were again 2,5 million museum visits in 2022 and the number of visitors continued to grow also in 2023. In the end of last year, a survey about the popularity of the museums was carried out. The most active museum visitors are women with higher education. Museums are mostly visited by families (40% of the population). During the last year, the most visited museums were the Estonian National Museum, the Seaplane Harbour, the Kumu Art Museum, the Ahhaa Science Center and the Open Air Museum. The most popular museums among the children under the age of nine were theme museums and science and technology museums, while they visited less art and nature museums.

The Estonian Museum Card

The card was launched on 11 April 2023 and it is a pass that allows free unlimited visits to over 100 museums and 500 exhibitions in Estonia for a full year. By the end of 2023 there was a total of:

- 10,690 museum card holders
- 55,957 visits with a museum card
- 44.7 average age of museum visitors
- 65% of card owners are women and 35% are men.

To preserve nature, the museum card is digital and has a QR code, and there is no separate plastic card.

The Green Museum certificate

The Green Museum is an environmental management system that helps museums to assess and reduce their environmental impact and operate more sustainably. Implementing the Green Museum principles aims to integrate environmentally responsible practices into all aspects of the museum's activities: management of the museum building and collections, environmental management, staff and stakeholder involvement, organisation of exhibitions, events, museum education and social

responsibility issues. All Estonian museums valuing sustainability and environmental protection are free to apply, regardless of size and field of activity.

The Green Museum system has been developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute Tallinn (SEI Tallinn) together with the Estonian National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The Estonian Association for Environmental Management manages the Green Museum system and issues certificates. They have also created a calculation model of the comprehensive environmental footprint of museums. The Kumu Art Museum was the first to receive the certificate in 2022.

The Estonian Association of Museums

The Association is a non-profit organization and was established in December 2022. Its members are Estonian museums, represented by museum directors. It is an interest protection organization of museums, whose main activity is aimed at standing up for the common interests of the museums that have joined the association and for balanced development. The organization unites Estonian museums, regardless of their form of ownership, by bringing together their common interests, and participates in the creation of laws and strategies in the field of culture and education, being a partner for the state and local governments. 16 Estonian museums joined the Estonian Association of Museums when it was created.

Triin Vaaro

FRANCE

There are three points to bear in mind when considering the year 2023 for museums in France:

The first concerns our audiences. In most establishments, museum attendance levels are equivalent to, and in some cases even higher than, those recorded before the Covid-19 pandemic. The Louvre recorded 8.9 million visitors in 2023 (up 14% on 2022). In 2024, the museum's management will maintain a capacity of 30,000 visitors per day. The Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie, with over 5.1 million visitors, and the Quai Branly are also recording spectacular increases in visitor numbers.

This trend can be explained by the upturn in tourism and the opening of major quality exhibitions such as "Manet/Degas" at the Musée d'Orsay.

The same trend can be observed in the regions, with increases for the museums of the city of Strasbourg (+2% on 2019), the Louvre Lens (+4.2%) or an exhibition devoted to the Cosquer Cave in Marseille. In the same city, the Mucem, celebrating its 10th anniversary, stabilized its attendance at 1.3 million visitors.

The second concerns collections. In December 2023, the French Parliament passed a law on the restitution of human remains to foreign states. This text aims to facilitate the return of bodies or body parts collected under unworthy conditions, by derogating from the rule of inalienability of French public collections.

In particular, this law will speed up the processing of requests. Thanks to this law, it will no longer be necessary to obtain the authorization of Parliament, which will have to pass a law for each request for the restitution of a body or body parts. A general derogation from the principle of the inalienability of public collections has been introduced into the Heritage Code, enabling the State and local authorities concerned to act by simple decree issued by the Conseil d'Etat.

This is part of a wider project aimed at facilitating the retrocession of pieces from collections acquired by French museums under conditions (war trophies, looting, desecration of graves) now deemed unacceptable. In July, a first law concerning the restitution of cultural property looted from Jews in the context of the anti-Semitic persecutions of 1933 to 1945 was already passed. In 2024, the government's final bill on works acquired during colonization is due to be presented to Parliament.

The third concerns the role and commitment of museums. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, ecological commitment has become an imperative for many museums. Several museums have created positions linked to Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR), which aim to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment, particularly in terms of reducing energy consumption and the carbon impact of exhibitions. As the vast majority of the tons of CO2 emitted by exhibitions are attributed to visitors, establishments are also working on their local roots and their local audiences.

On December 17, 2023, an article signed by museum professionals was published in the French daily « Le Monde » under the title: "Les musées doivent pleinement jouer leur rôle dans le débat écologique" ("Museums must play their full part in the ecological debate"). The article follows on from COP28.

Here's an extract: *"In the face of climate change, and as COP28 drew to a close on Wednesday December 13, museums - institutions rooted in the life of the city - are at a turning point in their history, forced to reinvent their modes of action, thought and operation. Reducing the museum's carbon footprint is therefore essential.*

This seemingly technical subject has major implications for conservation standards, conditions for receiving collections from other establishments, and the movement of staff and visitors. Beyond this, it is essential to question the spirit of the place: what is a museum? What underpins and validates its public action? What contribution can it make to ecological issues?

Ecology cannot be reduced to technical issues alone. It also offers an opportunity to think differently about museums, places of content and emotion, where encounters with collections and others are encouraged. For museums are not just a repository for heritage - be it artistic, scientific, natural, ethnological or historical - dedicated solely to aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment ».

Samuel Cordier

GEORGIA

The 2023 report on Georgia's museums underscores their role in preserving cultural heritage, engaging in collaborative projects, and achieving international recognition. Encompassing conferences and exhibitions, it captures the dynamic narrative of a year characterized by creativity and global acclaim.

Our 2022 report (<https://europeanmuseumacademy.eu/national-museum-reports-2022/>, pages 28-29) reveals persistent challenges in the Georgian cultural field. The Ministry of Culture's lack of transparency obstructs communication with the museum community. Qualified staff is rarely involved in the decisions, and ICOM members free access to definite state museums remains restricted from 2022. The union of Science, Education, and Cultural Workers advocates for dismissed professionals, securing partial success in the Civil court. Ongoing protests signal unresolved issues.

Despite this, Georgian museums strive to maintain their activities nationally and internationally.

In 2023, two **international conferences** contributed significantly to cultural preservation and exploration. The first, "Collaboration in Times of Crisis: Preserving Natural and Cultural Heritage," held in April in Tbilisi, showcased collaborative efforts in heritage safeguarding. Jointly organized by the Georgian National Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum's Culture in Crisis Programme, and other partners, the conference emphasized unity during crises. Later in December, the Ajara Museums Union hosted the "2nd International Scientific Conference: Museum and Globalization," providing a platform for scholarly discussions on history, archaeology, cultural tourism, and museum management.

Noteworthy **professional achievements** were evident through projects emphasizing Georgia's commitment to heritage preservation. ICOM Georgia's project, "Integrate and Empower Ukrainian Heritage Communities in Georgia," in collaboration with ICOM Ukraine, Blue Shield Georgia, and others, empowered Ukrainian colleagues through temporary employment at the State Silk Museum. Another project, "Documentation and Protection of Cultural Heritage in Kaspi Municipality" of Blue Shield Georgia, funded by ALIPH Foundation, aimed to document museum collections, assess threats, and identify potential damage in Kaspi Municipality.

In Tbilisi, the **newly** inaugurated Museum of Repressed Writers, housed in the House of Writers, stands as a tribute to victims of totalitarian repression. Supported by "Tbilisi - World Book Capital," the American Embassy, and the CARDIF Foundation, this museum explores conflicts between Soviet authorities and writers, actively collaborating with institutions and serving as a platform for preserving Georgian

literature's rich history during the Soviet era. The State Silk Museum, anticipating large-scale rehabilitation in 2024, adds to the anticipation for future endeavors.

Internationally, Georgian museums gained attention through large-scale exhibitions. The Georgian Museum of Fine Arts celebrated its 5th anniversary with the "Banksy: The Birth of a Legend" International Exhibition, curated by Steve Lazaridis, showcasing Banksy's transformative journey from street art to museum walls. Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum hosted the 14th Tbilisi Photo Festival, featuring the "CORRESPONDENCES" exhibition by Soundwalk Collective with Patti Smith. Collaboration with the Embassy of Italy brought the exhibition "The Etruscan World: Treasures from the Museums of Chiusi, Chianciano, and Florence" to Georgia, marking the first arrival of Etruscan civilization wonders.

Highlighting **Georgian heritage internationally**, the PIROSMANI exhibition, a collaboration between the Foundation Beyeler, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and the Georgian National Museum, showcased around 50 major paintings by Niko Pirosmashvili. EUROPALIA Georgia in Belgium, featuring the "Georgia: A Story of Encounters" heritage exhibition, showcased over 200 exhibits at the Art & History Museum in Brussels. The cultural exchange extended to other institutions, including BOZAR, S.M.A.K., and "Les Drapiers" gallery, offering a diverse tapestry of exhibitions, performances, and literary encounters.

The year 2023 brought **international recognition** to Georgian museums, with two institutions – Stiletto Prize to Otar Lordkipanidze Vani Archaeological Museum (Georgian National Museum) and special commendation to Ilia Chavchavadze Literary-Memorial Museum (Tbilisi Museums Union) at the EMYA - European Museum of the Year Awards. Additionally, the Tbilisi Museums Union's socially responsible approach gained special commendation at EMA 2023 awards by the European Museum Academy, emphasizing the union's role in connecting Tbilisi museums to address historical and societal challenges.

Lana Karaia and Nana Meparishvili

GERMANY

In 2023, many museums in Germany have largely been able to consolidate their operations again after the closures during the pandemic and the restrictions imposed as a result of the energy crisis during the war in Ukraine. The Russian war against Ukraine is still present in exhibitions and the work of Ukrainian artists and museum experts in German museums.

Many museums not only reflect on their role in society, but also analyse their resilience to crises such as the climate crisis, natural disasters such as floods or the effects of conflict and war.

The German Museums Association focussed on these activities in its journal *Museumskunde* in 2023 and will dedicate its annual conference in 2024 to the orientation of and by museums in the times of multi-crisis.

The crises have far-reaching effects on politics and society. Current developments in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as the reappraisal of colonial history and post-colonial relations, have posed new challenges for some museums in Germany. ICOM Germany addressed the relationship between museums and politics in 2023 with various activities and will place this issue at the centre of its 2024 conference.

Climate protection and sustainability are two important topics that currently characterise two major trends in the work of museums in Germany. Due to their social significance, but also as consumers of energy and producers of CO², museums have a special responsibility in times of climate change. In 2023, the German Museums Association placed these topics at the centre of its work and highlighted various facets at its annual conference with over 500 participants. With the collaboration of 70 experts from museums in Germany, a guideline on sustainability in museums was created, which opens up perspectives for the preparation of climate balance sheets, the anchoring of climate protection measures in practical museum work as well as communication and the mobilisation of employees and museum users.

Numerous important museums in Germany are currently closed for several months or years due to renovation measures. This affects not only historical museums and city museums such as the Münchner Stadtmuseum, the Historisches Museum Hannover, the Focke-Museum Bremen or the Märkisches Museum Berlin, but also important specialised museums such as the Pergamonmuseum Berlin, the Archäologische Staatssammlung München, the Schiffahrtsmuseum Bremen or the Industriemuseum in Oberhausen and others.

We can look forward to seeing what impetus this work will provide in the coming years for the design of climate-friendly, sustainable and innovative museums.

Dietmar Osses

GREECE

In Greece, 2023 was a year studied with bold new exhibitions in the country's museums and cultural institutions, some of which flow over into 2024. Salient exhibitions include those hosted at:

The Benaki Museum honoured the life and work of [Ellie Sougioultzóglou-Seraïdári](#), better known as Nelly's, a photographer who left her own mark on the history of photography, with a powerful exhibition curated by Alíki Tsírgialou, head of the Benaki Museum's Department of Photographic Archives. **Marking a quarter of a century since the photographer's death and the fifty-year anniversary since the creation of its Photographic Archives, the Benaki Museum**, custodian of her body of work which she entrusted to it in 1984, organised this retrospective exhibition of Nelly's work to re-introduce the artist to a contemporary public. **A journey through the multi-dimensional work of photographer Ellie Sougioultzóglou-Seraïdári (1899-1998), from her learning years in Dresden in the early 1920s, to her dynamic presence on the photography scene of Athens and then her twenty-seven years of work in New York, it comprised both recognizable and unknown pictures, portraits, landscapes of the Greek countryside, captures of monuments – but also the work she produced when active in advertising, colour photography and photojournalism.**

The recently expanded National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum inaugurated its new exhibition programme in June 2023 with a historical group exhibition composed of Greek artists, held in the temporary exhibition hall. Called '[Urbanography](#)', the exhibition explores the urban experience in the visual arts and in cinema from the 1950s through to the 1970s and approaches the city as an experience, examining the themes of urbanisation, reconstruction and migration –both internal and external– in the context of the rapid changes that occurred in Greek society in the postwar era. The artists therefore conceive and represent the city not only as a built/structured environment, but also as an everyday experience. The exhibition explores the accounts of the urban experience in the visual arts, in well-loved Greek movies, as well as in critical realism films thanks to the initiation of a collaboration to that end with the [Greek Film Archive](#). The exhibition will run until March 3, 2024.

At the **Acropolis Museum**, in the area reserved to temporary exhibitions, visitors are invited to discover "[NoHMATA 'Meanings'. Personifications and Allegories from Antiquity to Today](#)", which runs until April 14, 2024. Bearing the distinctive stamp of the museum's general director, professor Nikólaos Stambolídís, this impressive exhibition features 165 masterpieces belonging to different periods in time, which

engage in a very fruitful and productive dialogue between Antiquity, Byzantium, the Renaissance and Modern Art. The concept underlying the exhibition became a reality thanks to loans from 30 museums, both European (e.g. the British Museum, the Prado, Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Gallerie dell' Accademia in Venice and the archaeological museums of Florence, Napoli and Rome) and Greek (the National Archaeological Museum, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Christian and Byzantine Museum). It occupies the entire 700m² reserved for temporary exhibitions and, in the words of its curators, simultaneously "conveys a dialogue between two different creative eras and a tetralogy that presents together four different periods of art: Antiquity, Byzantium, the Renaissance and Modern Art". By bringing together artefacts both large and small, from coins to paintings, from books and manuscripts to frescoes, and from vases to statues belonging to the most important museum collections of Europe and Greece, the exhibition is also an example of what can be achieved when, through loans, museums enter a partnership to highlight a specific theme.

In mid-December 2023, the **Museum of Cycladic Art** inaugurated a temporary exhibition on "[Chaeronea, 2 August 338 BC: A day that changed the world](#)" recounting how the victory of Macedonia's Philip II over the allied forces of Athens and Thebes at the Battle of Chaeronea changed the course of History by projecting his son Alexander (the Great) on to the political scene and thus signifying the passage from the Classical to the Hellenistic world. The museum narrative about this pivotal moment in history encompasses the event itself, what followed and how we experience its consequences to this day (all the gold used in the Western world until 1492 was the gold that Alexander brought back from his campaign), while also honouring the first Greek archaeologists to excavate the site. The exhibition itself comprises over 240 exhibits, several on public display for the first time, from 27 Greek museums and foundations and four private collections, and is another example of international cooperation, as it also features two marble busts on loan from the Vatican's Chiaramonti Museum. Among the exhibition's highlights are one of Andy Warhol's iconic 'Alexander the Great' (1981) portraits and the unique burial assemblage of a warrior from Igoumenitsa with his iron cuirass and silver-plated helmet, as well as a reconstruction of the battle for younger visitors both as a diorama with custom-made Playmobil figures created specifically for the exhibition and as a brief story using comics. It should be noted that 'Chaeronea, 2 August 338 BC' is the first of what the Museum of Cycladic Art intends to be a series of exhibitions titled *Human Histories*, which will focus on "the life, manners and works of mortals, which influenced the life, perceptions and thinking of later generations".

Another major event on Greece's cultural calendar was the inauguration of the [Maria Callas Museum](#), the first worldwide, by the City of Athens on October 25, 2023 to mark the centenary since her birth on December 2, 1923. Housed in a listed building on central Athens' Mitropóleos Street, this homage to one of the greatest sopranos of the 20th century presents over 1,000 items belonging to or associated with Callas aimed at highlighting her career and personality. Valuable documents, sheet music, rare live recordings, a unique collection of records, insights into the people who influenced her life, as well as personal items, dresses, opera costumes and jewellery form the core of the permanent exhibition. Throughout it all, visitors are invited to experience the Callas phenomenon, among others in three themed soundproof studios (a forest, a replica of her Paris apartment and a recording studio) where they can listen to her renditions of the arias in *Norma*, *Tosca*, and *La Traviata* and appreciate her voice range, unique sound palette and charisma on stage or, also, discover a recording of her giving a masterclass at the Juilliard School in New York in March 1972. The Museum's objective is to bring to life the woman behind the legend and, by making her more accessible to the broader public, "charm those who don't know her and don't listen to opera... and help them understand what made her stand out" and how performances changed the course of opera forever.

Lastly, just before 2023 came to a close, the [Museum of Modern Greek Culture](#), as the renewed and expanded Museum of Greek Folk Art (founded in 1918) is now called, inaugurated its redesigned permanent exhibition. Situated in the Athenian district of Plaka, it occupies the block defined by Areos, Adrianoú, Vrysakióu and Kládou streets and is composed of 18 restored historical buildings and their surrounding areas, as well as the neighbouring Tzisdarakis Mosque (built in 1759) in Monastiraki. The complex brings to life the vestiges of the former Vryssáki (i.e. Little Fountain) neighbourhood, showcasing its architectural wealth (e.g. the unique two-storey Ottoman mansion where Lord Elgin stayed prior to shipping the Parthenon marbles to Britain) while offering a rounded approach to Modern Greece's tangible and intangible heritage, from 1750 to 1960. The exhibition itself is organised around a series of independent thematic modules, each housed in a separate building and focusing on the people who made and used the items on display.

Nadia Macha

HUNGARY

General statistics

In 2023, a total of 840 museum institutions held an operating licence. They can be classified according to the following categories, which are regulated by the Museums Act:

- national museums: 13 (about 1.54% of all institutions)
- national specialised museums: 18 (about 2.14% of all institutions)
- urban museums with a county-wide authority: 19 (approx. 2.26% of all institutions)
- regional museums: 68 (about 8.09% of all institutions)
- thematic museums: 42 (5% of all institutions)
- museum collections of public interest: 172 (c. 20.47% of all institutions)
- museum exhibition space of public interest: 508 (c. 60.47% of all institutions)

Sustainability

In 2023, many museum events were closely linked to the theme of ICOM World Museum Day on sustainability and well-being. Several professional organisations organised conferences and workshops on the theme, helping museums to strengthen their sustainability focus. One highlight was ICOM Hungary's conference on 'Museums, Sustainability, Well-being', which covered topics ranging from actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change and carbon emissions, to promoting sustainable use of ecosystems, addressing the challenges of social isolation and improving mental health.

The Pulszky Society - Hungarian Museum Association prepared a working paper entitled 'Green Museum', in which it defined a green or sustainable museum as one that is aware of environmental (ecological), economic and social sustainability and strives to achieve them in all three areas. Green museums can be of any size and in any discipline.

War in Ukraine

Many museums responded to the war in Ukraine in 2023. Domestic museum organisations were in constant contact with their Ukrainian counterparts. There are a large number of Ukrainian refugees living in Hungary, for whom many museums offer free admission and run special museum education programmes. In parallel to the NEMO initiative, the Pulszky Society - Hungarian Museum Association has set up a

new menu item on its website called Museum Alternate, which aims to make the information collected and submitted to the European platform in English available in Hungarian to Hungarian professionals and also to a broader audience.

New, major exhibitions

The Hungarian Genius Programme was launched in April 2022 in the context of the Petőfi Memorial Year. The programme, which was funded by the government with HUF 3.5 billion and coordinated by the Association of Hungarian Rural Museums, provided support for rural museums. On the one hand, the programme provided financial assistance to museums in the Carpathian Basin through a call for applications. The funds provided enabled museums to create new temporary and permanent exhibitions to demonstrate their values, carry out scientific research, organise conferences and study tours for the benefit of their local communities. This has resulted in 38 permanent and 26 temporary exhibitions and 39 scientific research projects. The second pillar of the programme was a travelling exhibition, which completed its national tour in December 2023. It was a large-scale and representative exhibition of a selection of special artefacts from rural museums (150 artefacts from 67 museums in total) in seven locations throughout the country.

The Museum of Fine Arts, in collaboration with the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris organised an exhibition of Pierre-Auguste Renoir's work, focusing on the painter's figure portraits.

In 2023, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Judit Reigl, a world-famous painter of Hungarian origin. Several exhibitions were organised to mark the occasion: in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts: *Reigl Judit - Dance of Death*, in the Budapest History Museum - Budapest Picture Gallery: *Szárnyalás - Vol-Flight*, and in the Kunsthalle Budapest: *Reigl Judit and the Second School of Paris*.

International success

The Money Museum was awarded the DASA Prize for the importance of museum learning by the EMA, in recognition of its exhibition content, user-friendly exhibition spaces and effective museum education. According to the jury, the Museum of Money provides visitors with an interactive and entertaining introduction to the financial process, the basic rules of money and the activities of the Hungarian National Bank. The use of state-of-the-art equipment and exhibition design practices make visitors aware that money can be made understandable to everyone.

Danger - problems

The extreme inflation caused by the energy crisis has a negative impact on the level of wages in the sector. In 2023, low wages for museum sector workers have become a serious problem, leading to wage tension. There are also growing differences between museum professions and between different generations and types of institutions.

Zsolt Sári

ICELAND

In Iceland, a country of 388,000 people, there are close to 200 museums, exhibitions, and cultural and historical centres. But only 47 museums are accredited by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and work according to the Icelandic Museum Act and the ICOM code of ethics. No museum has been added to the list of accredited museums during 2022. Three of the state-funded museums are listed as principal museums; The National Museum of Iceland, The Museum of National History and The National Gallery, and they have the role of forming strategies for other museums in their respective fields.

Accredited Icelandic museums are still in the process of adapting to new regulations and demands as their legal duty to collect, preserve, safeguard, and promote their collections is now monitored by the Icelandic Museum Council. Each museum reports annually to the Museum Council (i. *Safnaráð*), which has the role of monitoring all museum operations, according to the Museum Act.

Many Icelandic museums experienced a record number of museum visitors in 2023; a much quicker recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic than most expected. Museums are the third most popular attraction for travellers in Iceland, after Nature Baths and Spas, based on research by the Icelandic Tourism Board.

Nevertheless, many museums did and still do struggle with their owners and their understanding of their role. Many Icelandic museums are owned and funded by local municipalities across the country and too many have had to fight budget cuts, policy changes and merging of different institutions to name a few examples.

Conferences and workshops were held throughout the year – focusing on preservation, exhibitions, visitor experiences etc. This time round the Icelandic Museums Association (FISOS) held their annual conference abroad, in The Netherlands. 120 participants from museums all around the country enjoyed lectures, workshops, museum visits and learning opportunities during the three-day conference; spread across Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Utrecht and Amersfoort. A total of 40 Dutch museums welcomed their Icelandic colleagues, who were most thankful for the informative and enjoyable visits.

A new director was appointed for The National Gallery of Iceland in March. Its new director is Ingibjörg Jóhannsdóttir, former principal of Reykjavík Art School. She takes over the position from Harpa Þórsdóttir, who was appointed director of The National Museum of Iceland in 2022.

The staff of Icelandic museums take on a wide range of projects regarding accessioning, exhibitions, research, preservation and visitor experiences. Both the museums as institutions and their staff have implemented good cooperation which has shown to be very helpful and rewarding, especially for the smaller museums. Despite different challenges, heavy workload and low staff numbers in most museums, Icelandic museums manage to thrive, set up exciting and educational exhibitions and reach travellers from across the world, all while diligently pursuing research, conservation and professional work.

Anita Elefsen

IRELAND

2023 was a year of crises on the world stage. Irish museums fared reasonably well under supportive Ministries with responsibility for Arts & Culture, and for Heritage. Growth continued, particularly in relation to named capital development projects (National Library West Wing development, Crawford Art Gallery Cork, the Natural History Museum heading for design phase, and others pending). The importance of supporting young people was maintained with the Creative Ireland Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 providing everyone age 1 to 24 years with more opportunities for creative engagement in their lives. A pilot scheme was provided for the After Hours at the Museum Grant Scheme for museums and galleries to open later, hosting innovative events encouraging more people to enjoy evening life in towns and cities across the country. The 1st of February was announced as a new public holiday, St Brigid's Day (in Celtic mythology Brigid was a triple goddess), and the first in Ireland to be named after a woman.

In common with most countries, the key issues for Ireland were the dramatic increase in the cost of living, inflation, the soaring rises in energy costs (double/treble the cost for museums), and the growing challenge of immigration. We opened our doors to welcome 141,600 refugees in 2023, a 16-year high, representing the second successive 12-month period that over 100,000 people immigrated to Ireland. This is largely the outcome of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war, although refugees are also arriving from other troubled parts of the world. The Irish Museums Association expressed solid support with their Ukrainian colleagues, just as Irish museums offered whatever help they could and held events and exhibitions featuring Ukraine. EPIC/The Irish Emigration Museum hosted 'Ukraine-The Price of Freedom', telling the story of the struggle of the Ukrainian people, and Galway City Museum's show 'Ukraine 2022' included events organised by the Ukrainian community and a tree of life installation by Ukrainian children responding to the war.

The repatriation of cultural artefacts is the subject of a new expert committee established for the restitution of historically and culturally sensitive objects in Ireland. Several institutions are currently looking at this issue. The committee will advise Government and draft policy advice and guidelines. Included among its members are representatives of the national cultural institutions.

Climate change is an ongoing critical topic high on every agenda and being addressed at a range of fora by Irish practitioners seeking to reduce carbon through energy conservation and sustainable practice. It was supported by the Shared Island/Creative Ireland climate action fund to build wider awareness within the cultural heritage sector. Irish museums inputted into NEMO's interactive map showing how European museums are acting on the climate crisis and inspiring others to get active.

A snapshot of other developments:

The Museum of Literature Ireland MoLI won a European Heritage Award/Europa Nostra Award. The National Gallery of Ireland received a donation of 78 mainly Irish works from the Ulster Museum art collection representing a legacy gift by the Ulster Bank to the nation.

The ESB in partnership with the Irish Heritage Trust is to develop No. 12 Fitzwilliam Street as a museum in Dublin's South Georgian Core.

The Irish Wake Museum opened forming part of Waterford Treasures Museums joining the Medieval Museum, The Bishop's Palace, The Irish Museum of Time and Irish Silver Museum.

Monaghan County Museum closed prior to moving to a new museum in 2024.

The National Museum of Ireland held two Youth Assemblies to address issues of concern to young people towards the end of the Decade of Centenaries, and to explore the multiple identities, traditions and perspectives forming part of the overall Irish historical experience.

Funding for the redevelopment of the Little Museum of Dublin was announced. The Office of Public/OPW works launched an Irish Heritage Studies journal that will focus on research development and articles on OPW's substantial portfolio of material culture, including museums.

Marie Bourke

LITHUANIA

In 2023 the impact of the war in Ukraine remains significant for the political, economic, social and cultural life of Lithuania.

On 1 April 2023, the Seimas of Republic Lithuania adopted the draft amendment to the Law on Museums prepared by the Ministry of Culture. The law has not been revised since 2003.

In the new version of the law, unimportant provisions of legal regulation are abandoned, new principles of museum activity are established, and activities are specified.

In autumn 2023, the three-year museum competence development program 'Marta' was launched in Lithuania. The implementer of the program is the National Museum of Lithuania. While museum visitors expect more and more modern solutions, the program provides opportunities to learn from world-class museums. The program will ensure centralized and continuous development of museum-specific competences. First, specialists from 17 institutions – specialists from national and state museums of Lithuania – will be included in this program, but regional museums will also be included in the program later. The program is implemented in cooperation with the museums of the Baltic, Scandinavian and other European countries. The program is financed by the Ministry of Culture and the museums participating in the training.

Lithuanian museums and museologists have been actively participating in joined public initiatives and organisations in support for Ukraine. The contribution of some museums stands out. On December 14-15, 2023 in the forum of Lithuanian museums "Muziejai: pokyčio jėga" (Museums: the force of change), the Lithuanian Museum Association (LMA) awards ceremony for the nurturing and development of museology took place, during which the Breakthrough of the Year award for the civic initiative in the implementation of a complex project – the rescue of Ukrainian museum values and their publicity in Lithuania was won by Skaistis Mikulionis, the head of exhibition curations of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art. He contributed significantly to the evacuation of 800 masterpieces (worth 50 million Euro) from Ukraine and preparing eight unplanned exhibitions of Ukrainian museum collections at the Lithuanian National Museum of Art.

From 28th November 2023 to 26th December 2023, the support campaign "Ukrainos kultūra neturi kuo gintis" (The culture of Ukraine has nothing to defend itself) was carried out.

The initiative was organized by the National Museum of Lithuania, Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) and "Stiprūs kartu" (Strong Together). The partners of the campaign are the Lithuanian Museum Association and the Lithuanian National UNESCO Commission.

The war in Ukraine destroys signs of historical memory and identity – the army of the country-aggressor devastates, destroys, loots and appropriates the cultural heritage of the Ukrainian people. The collected funds (10 000 Eur.) are intended for the preservation of the heritage in Ukraine, which has been destroyed by the Russians; and for the purchase of restoration materials and equipment.

In addition to that, support events and exhibitions for Ukraine were organized in national and state museums. Numerous other initiatives were implemented, and various employment activities were organized.

In 2023 exhibitions were held, expositions were renewed, and other activities and projects were carried out. It is important to highlight exhibitions and activities dedicated to the 700th anniversary of the city of Vilnius. The National Museum of Lithuania in one of its exhibitions "Aš esu vilnietis" (I am a citizen of Vilnius) encouraged one to consider who is a citizen of Vilnius – is she/he just one who was born in this city, or also one who came here, worked, created, left a less or more clearly noticeable trace? What people built this city? The exhibition allowed one to dive into the 700-year period by getting to know 50 stories about Vilnius and the people who created it. An open pavilion with the project "Vilnius prieš 200 metų" (Vilnius 200 years ago) was operating at the entrance of the museum.

The exhibition catalogues (listed below) published in 2023 by the Grand Dukes' Palace are also intended to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Vilnius:

the catalogue of the exhibition "Gedimino miesto aušra. Seniausias Vilniaus medinis pastatas ir unikalūs jo radiniai" (Dawn of the city of Gediminas. The oldest wooden building in Vilnius and its most unique finds) reveals the early period of Vilnius' history; the catalogue of the exhibition "Žygimanto Augusto gobelenai Vilniuje" (Žygimantas Augustas' tapestries in Vilnius) is intended to reveal the prosperity of the city of Vilnius in the Renaissance era; the catalogue of the exhibition "Lvivas sveikina Vilnių. Europos tapybos šedevrai iš Lvivo nacionalinės Boryso Voznyckio dailės galerijos" (Lviv greets Vilnius. Masterpieces of European Paintings from Lviv National Borys Voznycky's Art Gallery) is dedicated to cultural relations between Lithuania and Europe.

The exhibition "Vilniaus pokeris" (Vilnius Poker) in the private Museum of Modern Art – MO Museum.

"Vilniuje viskas įmanoma" (Everything is possible in Vilnius) Ričardas Gavel wrote in "Vilniaus pokeris" (Vilnius Poker). This work is still called one of the most important texts in Vilnius, and on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of Vilnius, it has been reworked visually in the MO Museum. "Vilniaus pokeris" (Vilnius Poker) by R. Gavelis, published in 1989 is the most famous Lithuanian novel about Vilnius in Lithuania and abroad, which has received the most translations into foreign languages.

The exhibition "Pasilikti, emigruoti, grįžti?" (Stay, emigrate, return?) opened in the Panevėžys Regional History Museum in 2023, earned a nomination for the best exhibition of the year at the Lithuanian Museum Association awards for fostering and development of museology.

This exhibition analyzes one of the most pressing problems in Lithuania – emigration. The stories of intellectuals of the past century and the native emigrants of today, as well as their motives and behaviour in the diaspora are reviewed in the exhibition. Video stories of people who lived, are currently creating their lives or have returned to live in Panevėžys after emigration were specially prepared for the exhibition.

In 2023 the Open-Air Museum of Lithuania successfully implemented the project 'The Travelling Manor of Aristavėlė'. This European Economic Area (EEA) project is funded by the Culture Program of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism of 2014-2021. The aim of the project is to reach remote communities through mobile events. The project was evaluated as the one matching the objectives of the program the best.

Visitors' target groups include children between the ages of six and 13; youth between the ages of 14 and 29; and people from peripheral and culturally isolated communities.

A mobile travelling exhibition with a tent was created and 10 towns in Lithuania and two towns in Norway were visited. 22 different activities were implemented during the project. A total of 3,611 participants took part in the project: 1,569 of them were adults, and 107 – cultural workers. Moreover, 1,896 children and students participated in the educational sessions.

Gita Sapranauskaite

LUXEMBOURG

One of the most important steps towards the professionalization of Luxembourg's museum sector is the legislation passed on July 14, 2023, which established public institutions in the cultural field (Lois du 14 juillet 2023 portant sur la création des établissements publics). Among those are the Casino Luxembourg – Forum d' Art Contemporain and the MUDAM Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean. The bills' goal is to anchor these institutions permanently within Luxembourg's cultural ecosystem, providing the previous non-profit associations and foundations with the appropriate legal, managerial, and financial framework to accomplish their public missions.

Alongside these bills, other events such as the 22nd edition of the Nuit des Musées have positively impacted this year's museum sector. Launched by the capital's five museums in 2001, this annual event enables visitors to discover the various institutions' permanent and temporary exhibitions and/or to participate in specifically-curated performances, guided tours, and workshops. Considering the elevated number of visitors (27,033) in nowadays seven museums, the 2023 edition was particularly successful, going beyond even pre-Covid entry records. High numbers of sold tickets across 37 museums in Luxembourg (17,342) were registered during the Luxembourg Museum Days. This ICOM Luxembourg event took place in the context of the International Museum Day (May 2023). Noteworthy too is the second edition of the call for projects enabling Luxembourg's museums to invest into their scenography, management systems, and/or (digital) collections (Appel à Projets: Aide à la réalisation pour institutions muséales). Upon selection by a jury, the 2023 grant has been awarded to three regional museums dealing with Luxembourg's industrial, artisanal and/or rural heritage: the Minett Park Fond-de-Gras, the Museum A Possen, and the Rural and Artisanal Museum Peppange. The aid focuses on the professionalization, diversity, and value of Luxembourg's museums and heritage sites.

2023 has also been marked by the on-boarding process of four regional museums into "Museonet," which is both a network and a shared collection management system (CMS). Implemented by the Ministry of Culture's digital strategy department, the Government IT Centre (CTIE) and the National Museum of Archeology, History and Art (MNAHA), this platform equips museums with the necessary tools to professionally archive, harmonize and share their collections. Among this year's institutions were the National Brewing Art Museum, the National Museum of Military History, the National Museum of Resistance and Human Rights, and the Kulturhuef Grevenmacher. Lastly, the National Museum of Natural History's 'Natur Mobil' and

'Science Mobil' have been shortlisted, alongside eleven other institutions out of thirty-two applications, for this year's Children in Museums Award by the Hands On! International association and the European Museum Academy Foundation. To quote the 2023 Judges Report, « [t]he judges praised the valuable work being done outside the regular museum boundaries, acknowledging that it is costly and takes a great effort to maintain. The programmes are of very high quality, well-designed, workable and outstanding in content, illustrating complex topics in a way that makes them accessible to their audiences and in turn providing a meaningful and lasting experience. »

Nathalie Kerschen

MALTA

Malta's museum ecology is broadly split between public, religious, and non-governmental/private with each sector roughly representing a third of the entire museum landscape. The national museums and heritage sites are managed by Heritage Malta, an umbrella structure that also functions as the national institution for cultural heritage. Catholic cultural heritage museums and sites are run by the Catholic Church, and mostly also managed on a voluntary basis with the exception of the Cathedral Museum in the Old City of Mdina. The private museum sector, including Foundations and Non-Governmental Organisations, includes two main non-governmental organizations and a number of house museums.

Heritage Malta continues to act as the main reference point for cultural heritage in Malta regulated by the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 and subsequent amendments. However, the ecosystem is still missing long-overdue policies and regulatory frameworks. The most important of these is a museum registration scheme regulating the operations of private and non-governmental museums. Malta does not have a dedicated museum law and no national museum association. These deficiencies are hindering the much-needed sustainable development of the sector.

The national network of museums (Heritage Malta) has increased three-fold over the past decade going from 35 to 90 museums and sites thus making Heritage Malta's remit prevalently and overwhelmingly concerning sites rather than museums. This has come about without a significant increase in government subvention meaning that the national agency has increasingly been under pressure to develop revenue-generation mechanisms to address this shortfall. Since 2019, the national agency has been registering a loss of around 1.5 million which is made good by the Government of the day. Figures for 2023 are as yet unknown as the annual report has not been published.

The Maltese museum sector remains highly dependent on tourism, with local participation mostly related to open days organized regularly by the national network of museums and educational events organized from time to time by museums in general.

Interim figures for the first six months of the year made public by Heritage Malta in mid-2023 suggest a full recovery from the Covid-19 hiatus with paying visitor numbers adding up to 631,406 visitors. This represents an increase of 16,366 visitors over pre-pandemic numbers. This is at face value significant given that the Grandmasters' Palace, the main tourism attraction within the national network of museums and heritage sites, has been closed throughout 2023. There is no data to

compare to as far as museums and heritage sites run by non-governmental organisations.

A further 62,856 non-paying visitors were also recorded over and above these figures. However, these figures cannot be analysed further given the lack of data around age groups, purpose of visit, local and/or international. In general terms, the non-paying visitors registered during period under review can be recognised as being prevalently locals and, to this effect, representing circa 8% of Malta's current total number of inhabitants. There is no data around quality of user experience and visitor expectations.

Museums and heritage sites that have reopened to the public during 2023 include the first phase of the Grandmasters' Palace in Valletta, inaugurated in January 2024. This project has been funded via the European Regional Development Fund with additional national funds allocated mostly for the purpose of conservation and restoration. Three new museums have been added to the Maltese museum eco-system. These include the Malta Railway Museum run by the Malta Railway Foundation, The Notarial Archives Museum run by the Notarial Archives Foundation and the Pilgrim's Lodge - Mellieħa Sanctuary Museum run by Mellieħa Parish Church (Maltese Catholic Diocese). All three of them can be comfortably bracketed within the history museums category.

A number of museum projects are still works in progress. These include the Gozo Regional Museum project which is well behind schedule and in need of a significant increase in funding. Works on the Malta International Contemporary Art Space, MICAS, is yet again behind schedule and is now set to open in 2024.

Works on the new museum at St John's Co-Cathedral continue to register progress following the inauguration of the first phase in 2021. A controversy around St John's co-cathedral has been triggered by an academic at the University of Malta's Department of Art and Art History with the support of 28 experts. This does not, however, constitute a risk to the project, which has been approved way back in 2015 with UNESCO's endorsement and is regularly monitored by local regulatory authorities. The new museum project for St John's Co-Cathedral is set to open to the public in 2025 with a projected cost of 13 million euro.

In the meantime, the St John's Co-cathedral foundation has completed the 16th year-long conservation and restoration project of the unique set of Flemish tapestries dating back to the time of the Order of St John and has re-exhibited them for a brief period in situ within the church for a short span of time. These will now be permanently located within the new museum.

In general terms, the sector has recovered from the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. EU funds continue to provide a decisive injection for the conservation, restoration and upgrade of museums, their collections and cultural heritage in general. However, the day- to-day running, programming and related outreach initiatives requires human resources and funding that the local museum eco-system still struggles to sustain over the long term.

The main challenge for the Maltese museum eco-system is autonomy from politics and its long- term sustainability. Increasingly, there is a clear need for a more effective and decisive application of the arm's length principle at political and senior management level that would ensure the implementation of best practices, recognition of expertise and a far more resilient sector.

Sandro Debono

MOLDOVA

2023 brought some legislative and institutional changes to the museum system of the Republic of Moldova, which cover all categories of museums except national ones.

It is important to note that in addition to the Ministry of Culture, a new Service has been created, which will coordinate activities related to recording and classification of movable heritage, including museum heritage.

A distinctive feature of museum activity in 2023 was an increase in the number of visitors in all museums by approximately 25%.

The project 'Mobile cultural heritage – a step towards a new communication platform', a project for the online promotion of museums and museum heritage, has been completed.

In order to modernize museum exhibitions and increase the number of visitors, the 'Museums of the Future' program was launched in the second half of 2023. The program aims to increase the visibility of museums by introducing innovation and, accordingly, modernizing the space to offer the consumer new experiences and respond to consumer needs of different audiences. The museum spaces will be transformed into spaces of the future, housing digital installations, immersive and art exhibitions, and new media, allowing visitors to have an interactive and integrated cultural experience. The technologies used will help museums to better attract the public to explore culture, history, art through digital tools. Within the program, nine projects will be implemented in various museums of the republic. The projects will utilize technologies and elements of new media art to create immersive exhibitions and digital installations to provide visitors with the most complex experiences. The 'Museums of the Future' program is implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture.

Elena Plosnita

MONTENEGRO

During 2023. museums and galleries of Montenegro were working on the modernization of permanent exhibitions, seen through modern museology.

That includes multilingual audio guides, exhibitions are adapted for visually impaired or blind people, and they are adapted for people with invalidity as well. The different educational programs were organized for children of different ages and for children who are part of the group of people without parental care and the Roma community.

In addition, it organized a few international exhibitions in Montenegro and abroad. The result of this was a growing number of visitors to museums both local and foreign people.

I believe that the positive trend will continue during 2024 as well.

Isidora Kovačević

THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch museums in 2023 meant soaring visitor numbers and upcoming financial worries.

Facts and figures in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has close to 18 million inhabitants on 41.500 km² (12% of Germany) and over 625 museums. Close to 500 museums are affiliated with the Dutch Museum Association ('*Nederlandse Museum Vereniging*') and/or officially registered. The Netherlands is generally seen as a small, densely populated country, with many museums.

New record in visitor numbers

The Dutch Museum Association expects around 29-32 million visitors. This comes close to a new Dutch record. The expectation is based on the cardholder visits.

Note: Some 1.5 million Dutch people have a Museum Card (€ 75, -- / year for adults), which do give them access to approximately 500 museums. In 2023 a new record was set with 9.5 million cardholder visits.

However, there are growing problems in the exploitation

This highly appreciated growth in visitor numbers cannot hide the fact that almost all museums struggle with their exploitation. The high inflation and the disproportionately increase in the costs of energy, personnel, IT, insurances are a heavy burden for the future. As the generous governmental corona support has ended, museums have to find a way to lower their exploitation costs, while arguing for additional governmental support.

Increasing the price of tickets is not seen as a real solution, as they are quite high already (and only partially covering the exploitation). As the elections gave a significant, substantial victory for culture-unfriendly political parties (to put it mildly), there are serious worries.

Some striking things

- The Royal Eise Eisinga Planetarium in Franeker can proudly call themselves UNESCO World Heritage since September 19, 2023. The planetarium – build by a wool comber in his living room - opened in 1781. This is the oldest still-functioning planetarium in the world.
- As of 2014 the major ethnographic museums in the Netherlands merged into one National Museum of World Cultures. The founders of the Africa Museum, however,

founded in 1954 as a missionary museum, in 2023 openly and legally objected to a change in the policy of the National Museum. The conflict is to be characterized as a more traditional view on Africa and its way of living versus a more modern and 'correct' approach – and thus a conflict to be seen at many more museums.

- The problems in some museums are quite urgent. The Cobra Museum in Amstelveen – quite a significant museum - was on the brink of closing. A private benefactor made it possible to extend the closing with one year and a new business plan. The Fundatie in Zwolle, an equally visible museum, cannot overcome its debts and is in serious trouble. There have been some issues too on (mental) workplace safety.
- At the same time there are new private museums announced, like the Hartwig Art Foundation which has started a new museum at short notice. And the art-collective 'Drift', supported by a generous benefactor, aims to open in 2025.
- The Dutch Hermitage Amsterdam (an outlet) severed its ties to the Russian Hermitage and will continue as the H'art museum. The changed name and especially logo led to a (now solved) branding conflict with the Belgian art magazine HART.
- We have to mention the extraordinary Rijksmuseum's major Vermeer Exhibition, which closed June 4. An astonishing record of 650,000 people signed up to see the 28 paintings of this 'now or never-exhibition'. Many more wanted to come, but all tickets were completely sold out, despite greatly extended opening hours. As interesting was the boom on publicity, for example the many additional Dutch television programmes, for example a competition in which amateurs could try to paint like Vermeer (and got lessons on the way).

Mariëtte Frederiks and Dirk Houtgraaf

NORTH MACEDONIA, REPUBLIC OF

Most of the programmed museum activities for 2023 in the Republic of North Macedonia were realized as usual through the annual open call of the Ministry of Culture, financing more than 90 percent of the annual activities related to the museums, bearing in mind that North Macedonia has no private museums. The activities of the museums are dependent on the funds allocated through this annual call. Systematic archaeological excavations, as well as the conservation of architecture and mosaics of archaeological sites throughout the country are actively being carried out. The discovered archaeological findings are museologically processed and conserved. In parallel with the research, the process of digitalization, protection and processing of the museum artefacts is taking place as part of multi-year projects in cooperation with domestic and foreign archaeologists and researchers.

The condition of the artefacts in the permanent exhibitions and depots is currently being taken care of through the preparation of reports on their condition and conservation projects. A variety of art, ethnological, archaeological, etc. exhibitions were held with catalogues translated into several languages. Through the museum projects in 2023, the role of museums in the educational process and raising awareness among young people about the values of cultural heritage and Macedonian traditional culture is particularly emphasized. An ongoing project is happening on modernizing the depots of the museums and modernizing the permanent exhibitions. The project for the complete renovation of the National Museum of North Macedonia, opened in 1977, the largest national museum in the country, is finished. A renovation contract was signed by the Ministry of Culture in November 2023, which will begin with the replacement of the roof structure of the Museum. In the administrative procedure of adoption is the proposal of new Law on Culture, which has direct implications for the adoption of a new Law on Museums and the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage. The results of the research in the museums were published within the framework of publishing projects that were presented to the public, in the form of magazines and catalogues. Larger museum institutions work in accordance with the modern museological challenges of preparing modern guides/catalogues for visitors. The international activity of the museums in 2023 in North Macedonia is mainly focused on exhibition activities of a regional nature, that is, with the neighbouring Balkan countries. Museum institutions from North Macedonia actively worked on the realization of projects for cross-border cooperation using EU funds, especially highlighting the cooperation with the R. Greece.

Gordan Nikolov

NORWAY

Norwegian museums have also this year been affected by the world situation, due to inflation and high energy costs. Some museums have been affected by stormy weather due to climate change. But luckily visitor figures have, for most museums, reached 2019-levels. Some museums report on visitor records.

There are lots of plans for new museum buildings and some museums have received funding to start the building process. In Hamar the *Anno Museum* and *the National Archive* cooperate in building a regional historical center. This is a solution to the open-air museum's need for an indoor exhibition hall, workshops and a restaurant which gives them the opportunity to be open to the public all year round. *The Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway* will start building their new exhibition building in the spring 2024. In April 2024 *Helgeland Museum* in Vevelstad [Nytt museumsbygg åpner i 2024 - Helgeland Museum](#) will open a new building as part of the program for Bodø 2024 - European Capital of Cultural. Many Norwegian museums made progress in working with preservation and took into use new storage buildings in 2023.

The Norwegian Parliament appointed in June 2018 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to examine the Norwegianisation policy and injustice against the Sami people, Kven people and Forest Finns. The Commission submitted its report to the Parliament in June 2023. This report will also influence how museums work with these questions.

Repatriation work is going on. In December a Sami drum was returned to *Saemien Sijte* in Norway. This drum has been away for 300 years. It was removed to be destroyed to eradicate a part of Sami culture, but a few survived. The drums were used by spiritual leaders during various rituals, for example to give advice, make decisions or make contact with the deceased. The *RiddoDuottarMuseat* has also got Sami objects back from abroad.

A research project mapping Sami objects in Germany is going on - Davvirat Diuskas. One of the project's aims is to share expertise and knowledge with German museums to make them better in presenting and mediating Sami culture. [The Sámi Collection at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – A multi-perspective approach to provenance research \(pressemelding\) – Norges museumsforbund \(museumsforbundet.no\)](#)

Accessibility is focused – both as a theme in national conferences and in museums. A survey on accessibility in the museums was presented showing there are several challenges to solve in the museums in the years to come. Accessibility was the topic for the Museum Conference in October 2023 as well. The new directorate - Arts and

Culture Norway – which replaced the Arts Council in January 2023 – has also granted money for accessibility-projects for 2024.

Participation is another key word for what's going on in Norway. Through the project 'Young critics', a toolbox or guide is made to strengthen children and young people's critical participation in museums. Museums are central communicators of history and cultural heritage and important sources of knowledge. The museums consistently enjoy great trust in society, without any critical light being cast on how this trust is safeguarded.

Inclusion is another key word and some museums have started choirs for people with dementia. They were inspired by a television program in Norway. There is a lot of research that points out the fact that music has a positive effect on health and memory.

The final report of the research project on volunteers in museums were launched in the late autumn of 2023: [Sivilsamfunn Rapport 2023 6 V3 Final.pdf](#)

In cooperation with *Museene Arven*, the program of Cultural heritage studies at NTNU is running a three-year pilot project to develop new formal education opportunities for both museum staff and graduate students within the field of inclusion and participation in museum. The project is financed by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The University in Bergen also offer a program for further education for museum staff concerning research in museums.

This document has been read and elaborated by Liv Ramskjær, Secretary General of the Norwegian Museums Association and by Hanna Mellemsæther, the new EMA national representative from Norway, who will replace me from February 2024.

Ann Siri Hegseth Garberg

POLAND

Reflections on museums in Poland in 2023 should be divided into two groups: (1) Polish museums in the context of supra-local challenges, (2) Polish museums and local challenges.

In the first group, I would point out the following issues:

(a) the climate crisis (in this area, museums in Poland are increasingly using modern technological solutions, developing the awareness of staff and service recipients; it should be noted that this modernization is of an 'insular' nature and does not exceed 10-15% of the institutional potential of the museum sector). **(b)** the pandemic crisis (the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic should be considered past: it does not affect the day-to-day functioning of museums; referring the experience of the pandemic only to the management area, it should be emphasized that it allowed for the development of procedures that could be applied in the situation of an analogous threat, which, according to epidemiologists, is a matter of time). **(c)** the war crisis (the war caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine has entered a long-term phase; the protracted nature of the situation has resulted in a decrease in positive emotions, which in the initial period of the conflict dominated Polish society towards refugees; in the Polish museum sector, the crisis resulted in the intensification of activities in the area of crisis management and the activity of museum NGOs to help refugees – museum workers, which is worth emphasizing).

In the second group (2) the following should be noted:

(a) a political change as a result of a democratic electoral procedure, which may also result in a paradigm correction in cultural governance, which means a change in the interests of decision-makers from the area of historical heritage, which is also an institutional instrument of "historical policy", towards contemporary culture understood as a catalyst for social and cultural transformation; Therefore, the next year will be a time of verification of the past period, this year 2023, characterized by the largest scale of state involvement in infrastructure investments in the history of Poland after 1918 (the last of which was the opening of the building of the Polish History Museum in Warsaw), at the same time characterized by the systematic centralization of management and the limitation of the autonomy of cultural institutions, including museums. The above-mentioned situation will serve as an inspiration for: **(b)** a debate on the legislative guarantee of the autonomy of cultural institutions, including the use of competition procedures for the appointment of managerial positions. **(c)** the debate of museum organisations on the identity and subjectivity of the museologists; In the current situation, the professional culture of this community (horizontal relations) is dominated by the administrative dependence of museums on their organisers (vertical relations). The subject of these debates may also be a

reflection on the new definition of a 'museum' according to ICOM (in 2023 it was limited) and the issue of financial empowerment of non-governmental organizations, which means that they carry out public tasks (such as the Association of Museums in Poland, which operated in Poland before World War II).

The limited size of the document allows us to indicate only the most important trends that (group 1) were continued in 2023 or (group 2) were initiated in 2023.

Piotr Majewski

PORTUGAL

The year 2023 brought good news, concerning cultural policies, mainly for museums, in Portugal. Once again, the number of visitors improved, mainly because of tourism. The previously announced political decisions, concerning a broader investment in Culture, namely in museums — buildings, human resources, and collections — started.

Visitors' data

In 2023, and due to a change of organization (the previous General-Direction of Cultural Heritage that supervised all National Museums, National Palaces and National Monuments in Portugal ceased its activity on December 31, giving place to a state public entity, *Museus e Monumentos de Portugal, E.P. E.* [Museums and Monuments of Portugal, E.P. E.]) the information on museum visitors (exact numbers) was not released. Nevertheless, we are aware of an increased number of visitors, both national and international.

A new structure responsible for museums and monuments in Portugal was appointed on October 1. Its functions just began on January 1, 2024. This new structure, a state public entity, aims to speed up and modernize the functioning and management of museums and monuments in Portugal, attending to the museums and monuments human and financial resources urgent needs and to involve the private sector in their financial sustainability.

The 'New' museum at Belém and an international call for the architectural project for the National Museum of Contemporary Art

Following the announced in 2022, the Portuguese State, since 2022 responsible for the Berardo Collection that integrated Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), opened the Museum of Contemporary Art, at Centro Cultural de Belém (MAC-CCB).

The previously announced decision to enlarge the National Museum of Contemporary Art, founded in 1911, led to the preparation of an international call for architects that was announced on the very last days of 2023.

Patronage laws

New rules to the private financing of museums are still being prepared, under the new possibilities opened by the new state public entity.

Digital transformation

A group of museum professionals has been working on the definition of the needs and urgencies of digital transformation.

Emília Ferreira

ROMANIA

Romanian museums experienced an upward trend in 2023, based on the gradual recovery following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, regional geopolitical stabilization (amidst Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, slight economic growth in Gross Domestic Product, negotiated changes in the country's government composition, and positive or negative legislative changes).

The most significant cultural event influencing the national museum activity was Timișoara hosting the European Capital of Culture in 2023. Governmental and local programs played a decisive role in the success of this European cultural program. Moments dedicated to contemporary art were complemented by exhibitions such as those at the National Museum of Banat – ‘Heritage under the Spotlight’ and those at the National Art Museum in Timișoara dedicated to the great artists Victor Brauner and Constantin Brâncuși.

Timișoara also hosted the annual meeting of the European Museum Academy, during which the ‘Heritage in Motion Award’ was presented on September 15, 2023, in the four categories of New Digital Experiences, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Heritage Audiovisual, and Heritage Schools. The Art Museum Award, DASA Award and Luigi Micheletti Award were also granted.

The implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, through which Romania committed financially and legislatively to facilitate the societal recovery from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, also meant new opportunities for museums in the country. This included the establishment of new museums such as the Museum of Identities and Transylvanian Conflicts - MUTRA. Other museum initiatives included the Memorial of the December 1989 Revolution (Timișoara), the Memorial of the Victims (Sighetu Marmăției), the Museum of Forced Industrialization and Uprooting (Satu Mare), Râpa Robilor (Aiud), and the Museum of Communist Horrors (Sfântu Gheorghe).

Among the new museums opened in 2023 were public initiatives such as the Museum of Books and Romanian Exile in Craiova, the Water Museum in Timișoara, or private initiatives like the Museum of Immersive New Art - MINA - in Bucharest and the Museum of Church Art at the Patriarchal Palace of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest.

Regarding temporary exhibitions with a significant impact on the public, whether through public or private initiatives, noteworthy projects included Art Safari in collaboration with prestigious museums in Romania or abroad, the ‘Picasso Effect’

exhibition at the Museum of Recent Art - MARE, and 'The Universe of Salvador Dalí' at ARCUB Bucharest.

In general, all museums in Romania, both public and private, saw increased attendance, whether paying or non-paying visitors, thanks to the success of flagship programs such as 'Night of the Museums' organized nationwide by the National Museum Network of Romania or governmental programs like 'Different Week' or 'Green Week,' in which the entire school population participated in various extracurricular activities throughout the year, many of which involved museum visits or educational workshops.

Government legislative initiatives varied, ranging from projects related to the Sectoral Strategy in the Field of Culture 2023–2030, the New Heritage Code, the Status of the Professional Cultural Worker, to public policies regarding 'Culture of the Future' or 'Open Culture'. Of these, only the status of the professional worker was adopted, necessary for regulating the activities of professionals not employed by public or private legal entities.

Valer Rus

SERBIA

During 2023, the major changes in the policies and work of museums in Serbia was focused on their collaboration with foreign museums and making reconstruction plans of new museum spaces. The increased interest in museum exhibitions in general that was pointed out in the previous report continued in 2023 as well, as a result of successful international cooperations and improvement of the quality of exhibitions. At the same time, in 2024, after many decades, the construction of new museum buildings was initiated.

First, the reconstruction of the old railway station building was planned in which the Historical Museum of Serbia will be situated. This museum was established in 1963, but never had its own building. Moreover, the reconstruction of the old power plant was planned for the Nikola Tesla Museum, which is currently placed in an inadequate small family villa, although it is one of the most visited museums in Serbia. Furthermore, the reconstruction of the buildings of the Museum of African Art, as a unique museum in our country which has recently become a state institution has been also planned out. Finally, the preparations for the project of the construction of the new building of the Natural History Museum, as a museum which preserves an important part of the natural heritage of Serbia, but never has its own building, has been also started.

At the same time, the establishment of several smaller museums, or museum units which would belong to existing museums in Belgrade and other cities, indicates the implementation of the decentralization of culture. For example, at the Museum of Yugoslavia, a Women's Museum was planned to be established, at the National Museum in Cacak, the reconstruction of one part of the building for Basketball Museum was planned, while in Paraćin, in the glass factory, the establishment of the first museum of glassmaking is initiated.

All this points to the improvement of awareness of the importance of museums, but also to the diversification of museums by some new types that have not yet existed in Serbia. This expansion of museum types is the result of the development of the idea what the role of museums should be in the 21st century and how important it is to implement them in the life of the local community. In addition to important national museums such as the History Museum of Serbia and the Museum of Natural History, which after more than 80 years of operation will finally get their own buildings, it is very important to establish smaller thematic museums that will expand the typology of museum collections and make museums in Serbia more diverse.

For the successful implementation of these innovative museum projects, collaboration with experts from European museums and museum organizations is essential in order to implement them as efficiently as possible.

Tijana Palkovljević Bugarski

SLOVENIA

Slovenia celebrates Prešeren Day, a cultural holiday. In 2022, a third of the population aged 16 or over went to at least one cultural event, most often a concert or theatre performance, and visited a museum exhibition. Prešeren Day has been a holiday of Slovenian culture since 1945, a year later it became a public holiday, and in 1991 (independence) it also became a public holiday.

Museums and galleries hosted over 1,000 exhibitions and, in particular, offered almost 39,000 different educational programmes. What's even more interesting; 2,176,114 people visited museums in 2022. E-exhibitions continued to be interest ((211,951). Museums in Slovenia (2022) are visited by 73.8% domestic visitors and 26.2% foreigners.

Since its independence, the Slovenian government has entrusted the management, direction and mission of cultural creativity to the independent Ministry of Culture. Also, the government has consistently allocated around 1% of GDP to culture (0.9% in 2022 - 1% in 2023). According to our statistics, each inhabitant has spent an average of €100 on culture.

As a special promotion and on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of the poet France Prešeren - 3 December 2000 - this Happy Culture Day was created; since then, cultural institutions and especially museums have opened their doors wide to visitors, offering events free of charge.

Around €63 million a year is spent on museums, of which €52 million comes from public funds. The number of museums in Slovenia has not changed significantly. At the time of the last review (analysis), there were 57 museums in Slovenia. Of these, 12 are state museums which have public service tasks, and which have been financed from the state budget. In addition to the museums whose founder is the Republic of Slovenia, the state public service is also performed by museums that have been authorised for this task. There are 36 authorised museums, 35 of which have been established by local authorities, and one museum is privately owned.

The Ministry of Culture is in the process of modernising the museum sector and preparing the National Strategy for Museums and Galleries 2024-2028. Through the Strategy, the Ministry aims to establish comprehensive long-term planning and thus ensure greater stability in the museum sector. Through multiannual plans, guidelines and priorities, the strategy will ensure continuity and greater financial and human resources stability for museums, the authors of the document said.

Museums in Slovenia also boast many museum awards. They were among the first winners of the Council of Europe Award (1993 Kobarid Museum) and the EMYA Special Prize, as well as the winners of the ŽIVA - The Best Slavic Museum Award (Mountain Museum, 2018 and Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, 2014).

Andreja Rihter

SPAIN

Spanish museums have fully recovered from the ravages caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and visitor figures for 2019 have been restored, in some cases even surpassed. For instance, the Prado Museum has achieved its highest visitor count in history, surpassing 3.2 million visitors. Other visitor figures are as follows:

- The Reina Sofía Museum received 1,409,113 visitors at its main headquarters.
- The Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum welcomed 1,012,660 visitors.
- The Guggenheim Bilbao acknowledges having experienced the "best year in its history" with 1,324,221 visitors.
- In Barcelona, visitors to municipal museums and exhibition centers have grown by almost a million compared to last year, reaching nearly 4.4 million people. Among them, the Picasso Museum received 1,032,400 visitors.
- Málaga has also seen a substantial increase in the number of visitors to its museums. Specifically, the Picasso Museum in Málaga received 779,279 visitors.

Finally, the 16 State Museums under the Ministry of Culture saw an 18% increase in visits in 2023, almost reaching 2.8 million. The most visited museum was the National Archaeological Museum, with over half a million visitors, a milestone not reached since 2018.

After a few years of a certain stagnation, new museums have been inaugurated in 2023. This includes the Gallery of Royal Collections in Madrid, a museum that began to be conceived in 2002. The Forbidden Art Museum in Barcelona, a privately initiated institution dedicated to works that have been censored, attacked, denounced, or withdrawn from exhibition, has also been opened. Completing this list is the Salvador Dalí Birthplace in Figueras.

2023 has marked the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Pablo Picasso, and this has been celebrated by many art museums in Spain, dedicating significant temporary exhibitions in his honour.

2023 was significant in terms of international recognition, as L'Etno, Valencian Museum of Ethnology in Valencia, was distinguished with the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA), and Chillida Leku in the Basque Country received The

Portimão Museum Prize for Welcoming, Inclusion, and Belonging 2023. Both cases stand out for their commitment to community engagement in their narratives and activities, a trend increasingly present in Spanish museums.

Antoni Laporte

SWEDEN

The war in Ukraine, and later on in Gaza, has had a major impact on Swedish museums. Plans for different types of crises and war have been made in many places. Many seminars and lectures have been held discussing how to prepare museums for war and what role museums and the cultural sector can play in times of crises. There is a view that museums have an important role to play in times of crisis, to maintain a sense of normality, to document what happens, to collect items and stories connected to crises, to protect and preserve collections, to maintain people's sense of identity and belonging. This is also connected to the other major topic under discussion - the climate crisis. Museums are encouraged to work with sustainability in different ways, and recommendations for museums on how to work with sustainability have been issued by the Swedish museum association. Climate change may also cause damage to the cultural heritage, through storms or flooding, which we have seen examples of during the year. This also calls for preparedness to handle a crisis.

Some interesting reports have been published during the year. A national survey about the confidence people has for different kinds of organisations placed museums at the top. People trust museums, their credibility is far higher than for example people's trust in the healthcare system or political parties. We can also see that the visitors returned to the museums again after the pandemic. The visitor numbers are back to normal levels for many museums, and Skansen, the open air museum in Stockholm, was the most visited museum. 17,7 million people visited museums in Sweden during 2023 (Sweden has a population of 10,4 million people). That is an increase from 2022 by 6%.

At the same time many museums have experienced budget cuts. High inflation has increased costs, high prices for electricity during wintertime has made it difficult for many museums to cope. There has been a debate concerning some national museums, whose buildings are owned by the government. The government charge high rents, and the increase in rent is very high when maintenance work or refurbishments are made. The National Museum of Fine Arts had to close on Tuesdays in order to make savings on staff costs to be able to pay their rent, which increased drastically after a total refurbishment of the museum.

The National Museum of Natural history had to close after parts of the ceiling broke down, due to lack of maintenance. And maintenance couldn't be afforded since it would mean a drastic increase in rent. Even though these examples have been debated, many other museums also struggle to make ends meet, and have had a hard time.

During autumn/winter a TV-series about the history of Sweden was broadcast. Museums in Sweden had been invited beforehand to connect to the TV-series by enhancing their local history or doing other things to complement the series. The first episodes of the series were also available for museums to show as a preview a couple of weeks before the premiere, which many museums took the opportunity to do. What is special about this programme is that there are two versions of every episode; one for adults and one for children, making it easier for museums to connect with the programme and different audiences. However, the programme was also criticised by museums for omitting important stories, in particular the first episodes were debated since they did not include the northern part of the country. This resulted in several social media-films and stories bringing forth the history of these parts, to complement the programme.

Anna Hansen

SWITZERLAND 2023

Post-pandemic situation

The number of museum visitors has almost reached the pre-pandemic frequency and most of the bigger museums are showing as many temporary exhibitions as before the pandemic.

Project “museum2030”

The Swiss museums association VMS and ICOM Switzerland have launched the common project “museum2030”, inciting 11 museums to analyse their own scope concerning sustainability and to develop a concrete project. The main fields are (1) sustainable consumption and sustainable production, (2) energy, climate and biodiversity and (3) equality of opportunities and social cohesion.

Project “climate and museum”

As a reaction to the energy crisis, ICOM Switzerland has launched the project “climate and museum”, a platform to facilitate the exchange among museum specialists, with the goals to obtain better data about climate corridors and by consequence to reduce the consumption of energy resources.

New guidebooks for museums edited by Swiss museums association VMS

- (1) Ecological sustainability in the museum. Concepts, instruments and recommendations
- (2) Citizen Science in the museum. Making research together with the entire society
- (3) Museums and immaterial cultural heritage. A dialog with tradition bearers

Provenance research and the public

Many museums are increasing their provenance research. Especially the polemic about the right way of presenting the delicate acquisition process of the Bührle collection at the *Kunsthaus Zürich* in its new extension building has been vividly discussed in the press. On contrary, the *Kunstmuseum Basel* has shown two exhibitions with critical approaches on all levels and deep insights: the exhaustive, informative and also beautiful exposition “Castaway Modernism. Basel’s Acquisitions of “Degenerate” Art” about the acquisition of masterpieces for the museums department of classic modernism in the summer of 1939, works that were among those denounced

in 1937 by Nazi cultural policy as “degenerate” and forcibly removed from German museums. The second informative and sensitive exposition, entitled “The Collector Curt Glaser. From Champion of Modernism to Refugee”, focussed on the art historian, curator and art critic Curt Glaser, a central figure in Berlin’s art scene. Persecuted by the Nazis he emigrated to Switzerland in 1933, most of his collection has been auctioned that year. The Kunstmuseum acquired 200 prints and drawing of that collection.

Benin Initiative Switzerland

Eight Swiss museums hosting some of the Benin bronze sculptures, created a research project with intense exchanges avec Nigeria. Their entire collections have been checked to identify stolen artefacts. The project is coordinated by the Rietberg museum in Zurich and supported by the federal government.

National heritage protection Ukraine

The Swiss museums association VMS and ICOM Switzerland are continuing their help for the mobile national heritage, with a focus on museum collections in Ukraine, supported by the Swiss government and in collaboration with other international organisations. Since the beginning of the war, more than 200 Ukrainian museums got material for protection, packing and transports from Switzerland, and various projects of the German network «Ukraine Art Aid Centre» have been supported.

Museum re-openings and jubilees

The *International Museum of the Reformation* in Geneva has reopened in April with a completely new permanent exhibition. Also in Geneva, the *Musée Ariana – Swiss museum for ceramics* and glass reopened its new permanent exhibition during the festivities of his 140th anniversary. At the *Landesmuseum* in Zurich, (Swiss national museum group), it’s 125th anniversary has been celebrated with special guided tours and events. For the *Aargauer Kunsthaus* in Aarau, the 20th anniversary of its extension building conceived by Herzog & de Meuron was the occasion of renovations of the exhibition spaces, improved lighting and a more welcoming foyer.

Awards

Once again, Swiss museums got distinctions at the European Museum of the Year Award: the *Payerne abbey* was prized with a special commendation and the *Swiss agricultural museum Burgrain* won the Meyvaert Museum Prize for Sustainability, a even more motivating distinction after having received the 2022 Prix Expo for the best exhibition in natural science.

Christian Hörack

TURKEY

On February 6, 2023, the earthquakes centred in Kahramanmaraş resulted in significant losses. Individuals were adversely affected in terms of life, housing, health, and many other rights and freedoms. Cultural assets were also subjected to the destructive impact of the earthquakes. Numerous immovable cultural assets were destroyed or faced the threat of extinction.

The significant destruction caused by the earthquake, particularly in the historical centres of cities (Hatay (Antakya), Adıyaman, Malatya, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Urfa, Diyarbakır), has not only impacted the historical identities of these cities but has also left profound wounds in the societal psychology of our country, accompanied by the deaths of thousands of people. The cultural assets of our cities, including the archaeological sites, civil and religious structures representing the coexistence of various cultures in this region, museums, and excavation areas, have suffered damage.

The Habib-i Neccar Mosque, built in the year 638 in Antakya, suffered significant damage. The historical mosque, named after a resident of Antakya who was among the first believers in the disciples of Jesus and sacrificed his life for this cause, had its dome, minaret, and some walls collapsed. In the neighbourhood where the mosque is located, very few structures could withstand the earthquake. The registered old mansions, Ottoman-era inns, and historical buildings in this area have completely disappeared. The historical Greek Orthodox Church in the city, a meeting point for different religions, also suffered severe damage in the earthquakes. The Battal Gazi Grand Mosque, a symbol of Malatya dating back to 1224, has been completely demolished, and the roof of the historic Hacı Yusuf Taş Mosque (1892) collapsed, causing significant damage. The Adıyaman Ulu Mosque, built between 1506 and 1515, has also been entirely destroyed. Many cultural heritage structures in the earthquake-stricken region, not covered in this report, have been reduced to rubble. Expert teams sent to the region by the Ministry of Culture have prepared damage assessment reports for all structures, and as of April 2024 restoration and reconstruction efforts have commenced.

Following the earthquake, in the report by the Ministry of Culture teams regarding the significant ancient structures in the region, it was stated that there is no damage to the magnificent monuments belonging to the Kingdom of Commagene on Mount Nemrut in Adıyaman, the world's oldest temple area Göbeklitepe, and the ancient city of Zeugma in Gaziantep. According to the statement made by the Ministry, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, and Adana museums have not been damaged. However, there is damage to a section of the Hatay Archaeology Museum, where very

important mosaics and the statue of King Suppiluliuma are exhibited, as well as to the Hatay City Museum. Both museums are closed to visitors, and repair works are ongoing. Following the disaster in our country, discussions have been initiated, particularly on actionable disaster plans for the risks posed by earthquakes in museums and cultural heritage areas. Programmes have started, addressing recommendations for the development of a national policy to reduce risks in cultural heritage areas and museums.

In 2023, besides the earthquake disaster, the occurrence of floods and flood disasters in our country has led to discussions on climate crisis and museum-related topics. In 2023, another major issue concerning museums in Turkey was the cultural artefacts smuggled abroad. Turkey has accelerated efforts within the legal and diplomatic framework to identify and repatriate illegally removed artefacts from its own territory, resulting in the return of 3,059 pieces to Turkey in 2023. Numerous informative meetings were held throughout the year on this matter.

Tunceli Museum, which was honoured with an award by the European Museum Academy, has been well-received in the context of museum practices in our country. The joyful news, announced by the ministry, has been featured in various news websites and social media platforms.

Dilek Yildiz Karakas

UKRAINE

We are all Ukrainians this year too!

Henrik Zipsane



UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Museum sector has faced another challenging year in 2023 with continued political turmoil and economic pressures impacting on both museums and their visitors. In common with European colleagues, museums have also been addressing the impact of the Israeli-Hamas War in Gaza supporting communities from both sides of the conflict and have also continued to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, as that war has unfortunately continued.

Events in Ukraine and the Middle East remain a contributory factor in higher costs, particularly in energy and while inflation figures have eased slightly public perception of what remains a 'Cost of Living Crisis' in the UK continues to be reflected in low levels of consumer confidence, which has had an impact on visitor numbers and spending to some museums across the UK.

While Covid has not disappeared (this writer suffered his first dose of the virus in September) its impact on museum visitor behaviour seems to have diminished somewhat. There has been some cause for optimism with visitor numbers improving but still lagging behind pre-pandemic levels. Data released by the Department of Culture Media and Sport revealed that visits to national museums in all UK nations have increased by 27% since 2022. As was the case in 2022, the results reflect a mixed picture however, with larger museums in London particularly seeing improved visitation as inbound tourism has increased and some other independent and local-authority funded museums doing less well away from the capital.

Outside London, severe cuts to locally funded museums are of great concern as councils struggle to balance budgets and retain key services in what the Local Government Association describes as 'the biggest squeeze on local authority funding in memory'. Budgets have been reduced and, in some cases, withdrawn completely and 2024 promises to be a difficult year for museums in places like Birmingham, Hampshire and Suffolk for example. See more:

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2024/01/museums-under-threat-as-councils-prepare-for-new-wave-of-austerity/>

A longer-term issue to museums linked to funding has been the impact of higher energy, labour and materials costs on their capital projects; many museum redevelopment schemes are now being rescoped and value-engineered to reflect uncertainties and increases in costs.

In brief:

- **Repatriation:** While ongoing discussions between the British Museum and the Acropolis Museum over the Elgin Marbles stalled in late 2023 when a meeting between UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotaki was

cancelled, others such as the Manchester Museum who returned 174 artefacts to the Aboriginal Anindilyakwa community of Australia's Northern Territory, and National Museums Scotland who began the process of returning a 37-foot memorial pole from to the Nisga'a Nation, an indigenous community in Canada have made good progress in this area.

- **The British Museum:** the theft of missing artefacts from the BM has been a big story in the UK museum sector in 2023. The loss or damage to around 2,000 items led to the resignation of the museum's director and an independent enquiry. See more: <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/news/british-museum-told-to-fully-register-collection-after-review-into-thefts/>

The subsequent debate has focused attention on museums of all types and sizes to maintaining documentation standards and the need for more funding to support the necessary but less glamorous task of collections management.

- **Other Issues:** in common with museums elsewhere in Europe, Decarbonisation and Decolonisation remain high on the agenda, with much good work being done by small, medium and large organisations to address these important issues. In the UK an excellent Carbon Literacy Toolkit has been issued by the Carbon Literacy Trust. See more: <https://carbonliteracy.com/museums/>

The British Museum has also courted controversy by signing a sponsorship deal with the global energy company BP which has led to much debate and calls for supporters to boycott the museum due the company's investment in fossil fuel production. See more: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/21/british-museum-crisis-thefts-fossil-fuels>

Decolonisation of collections remains an important if sometimes contentious issue for the UK heritage sector, and museums have sometimes found themselves at the centre of highly political 'culture wars' debate over their work.

Tim Bryan