



European Museum Academy

How are museums doing in Europe?

The European Museum Academy Reports on The Museum Temperature by the end of 2024.

The European Museum Academy is proud to present for the seventh year in a row the following more subjective inside views about how museums are doing and what the museums' current challenges are, be it political, financial, in legislation, 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? Politically? Financially? Museologically?

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 2024?

– an analytical summary by Henrik Zipsane

This is the seventh edition of the EMA Museums in Europe Situation Report. It is based on reports from the representatives of the Academy around Europe who have simply been asked: 'How were museums doing in 2024 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 typical and almost 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 look closer at trends in the following pages, it is indeed remarkable to realise the reality of European 'unity in diversity'.

Let us start out with some positive signs from a helicopter perspective on the developments in 2024.

There are clearly some very positive trends to be recognised from the experiences in 2024. The visitor numbers are generally very high. Country after country report that the upward trend from previous years after the pandemic continues. In some countries they have measured record visitor numbers as in Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Slovenia, and Spain. In some countries the upward trend in visitor numbers appears to have been concentrated in a particular area of the country, as in Italy where the northern part had rising numbers but little or no change in the central and southern regions. From a few countries there are reports about a very slight decrease compared to 2023 as in Romania, but that year experienced record numbers. It is symptomatic for the interest in visiting museums across Europe that the decrease in visitor number to museums in Paris during the summer caused by the focus on the Paris Olympic Games was quickly replaced by growth in the autumn and France ended up with good visitor numbers in total.

Another clear symptom of growing interest in museums is the national museum card which was first introduced in The Netherlands some years back is continuing to inspire other countries and is particularly worth mentioning here as the countries which report about the museum card in 2024 are all showing growing visitor numbers and explains this as an impact from the museum cards. After The Netherlands first inspired Finland to introduce a museum card it has had its first full year of functioning in Estonia and has become hugely popular. In Belgium a museum card was first

introduced in Flanders but in 2024 expanded to cover Wallonia and Brussels and in Portugal created its own museum card-like model by introducing a very popular voucher which provided 52 entrance fee free visits for nationals and foreign visitors to the country alike. In Sweden and Denmark there are now considerations about introducing a museum card, but as our representative in Sweden reports, there are many considerations to be made first which primarily centre around financial aspects for the individual museums which have different preconditions and organizational roots.

It is also positive to report that 2024 saw a great number of new museums opened and new major permanent exhibitions. For example, in Austria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Switzerland new grand museums were opened. It is a sign of long-term interest and engagement with these grand investments from public and private sources in museums. We need to have respect for the long-term thinking as is illustrated by the opening of Palazzo Citterio in Milan 52 years after the first plans were conceived. Preserving museums and taking care of historical buildings is a huge undertaking as one can imagine when thinking about the open air museum in Bojkrik which came to an end in the eight-year plan with restoration of more than 130 historical houses. It is part of the same trend of positive investments that museums in Albania and Croatia which were damaged by earthquakes a few years back were restored to former glory.

But there is a 'but' in the overall impression of trends from museum observers across Europe. The political economy of museums is always a focus point when we try to assess the working conditions. Our colleagues at NEMO – Network of European Museum Organisations – have recently published the results from a survey as a so-called barometer on political influence in museums in Europe <https://www.nemo.org/news-events/article/nemo-barometer-on-political-influence-on-museums-in-europe/> The report indicates that initiatives and actions to have more political influence in what the museums presents and prioritize is growing. The annual conference of NEMO in 2024 had this as a theme and several national museum associations have also focused on this challenge. The general issue is often illustrated by the difficulties in museum financing. Deeper analysis is however needed for understanding the character and depths of the broader issue and indeed also to ensure that this is not just a few people (i.e. museum professionals) who need to understand that they can't always get what they want.

All over Europe museums appears to be struggling with financing maintenance and running cists. The primary reason which is mentioned in most countries is the impact from inflation and rising energy costs. The public funding may have gone up too but

inadequately enough to cover the rise in cost. From Ireland in the west to Georgia in the east, and from Iceland in the north to Italy in the south, museums share that experience. The rise in costs combined with the inflation is of course not only a challenge for museums but willingness to compensate museums has in many countries been clearly lower by their funders than for other activities. This is somehow contradictory to the growth in interests for museums from the public. Some national reports indicate that the importance of museums is not recognised as it is not clearly understood, as for example in Iceland. In many countries there has been real cuts in public funding for museums on top of low or non-existent compensation for inflation as is reported from Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom. When museums try to meet these challenges by so-called smart financial solutions as for example outsourcing some visitor service as in France, it may not only create a risk for estrangement of the visitors from the museum because they are met by people who are not recognised as from the museum, but the museums does at the same time meet the reality of being held responsible for how the subcontractors treat their employees.

In the last decade the political signal to museums which are funded by governments, regional or local authorities has been clear about the necessity of attracting funding and income from non-public sources. This is today a reality for some museums, particularly in the northwestern corner of Europe but in other countries a change from being fully funded by the government is still under discussion and no political decisions have been made. In countries like Moldova, from January 2025 it is legal for museums to introduce an entrance fee. In other countries like Bulgaria any changes in museum legislation and regulations are delayed or plans constantly cancelled because of parliamentary political unrest and rapid elections. We may conclude that museums in Europe are moving at different pace when it comes to meeting the financial challenges with the solutions originally recommended by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and since 2024 a key message in cultural heritage policy development within the European Union. There is significant diversity among countries in Europe about lack of means and financing, and how to overcome these challenges. The message from our colleague in Montenegro is hopeful: *“Montenegro’s museum community faces significant challenges, but by recognizing these issues and uniting all stakeholders and their practices, there is hope for overcoming them in the near future”*.

The political influence in museums can be traced in different ways. In Denmark new legislation was passed after many years of discussions and failed initiatives. There are three elements in the new way of allocating grants to state-recognized museums: a basic grant, an incentive grant and a priority grant. The reform will probably lead to new and changed priorities in museums, including the importance of the incentive

element of the grant, where museums will receive funding according to visitor numbers, young visitors, research and own income. This may be characterised as an indirect political influence in the priorities of the museums as a sector in society. In Lithuania a long-awaited piece of legislation has been adopted which is planned to create a stronger cultural sector as central and local museums and authorities will be stimulate to closer collaboration. The new law is expected to more firmly guarantee human cultural rights, to ensure the equal provision of cultural services throughout the country.

Control over the leadership in museums is key to have a direct influence of what the museum is actually providing for its visitors. There are some examples presented which cause concern. In Malta the chairperson of the board of directors has taken over the role of museum director by direct decision of the board, creating technical administrative issues within the agency, besides the lack of know-how and expertise to run a museum. In Poland elections in 2023 and 2024 shaped a new political direction which also resulted in changes in the museum sector as after re-introducing competitions for director appointments there are many new directors and together with staff working now on the new programmes – exhibition programmes, education, sometimes also new mission statements. On the contrary in Slovakia museums meet challenges to professional stability, governance transparency, and financial sustainability. Actions by the new government, particularly within the Ministry of Culture have adversely affected cultural institutions, the independent cultural sector with a legislative amendment which permits museum and gallery directors to be dismissed without stated reasons. This development diminishes transparency in personnel policies and facilitates potential political interference in cultural institutions. Museums in Georgia have faced severe challenges due to escalating political instability. The adoption of the so-called ‘Russian Law’ in the spring triggered widespread protests, disrupting civil society and cultural institutions as the new legislation makes collaboration with countries in the west difficult. Large-scale protests have erupted nationwide, while government crackdowns further strained the cultural sector. Museums, which had long benefited from European partnerships, now faced uncertainty, with restrictions jeopardizing access to training, networking, and funding. Institutions advocating democratic values through exhibitions and research found themselves under increased scrutiny.

The museums in Ukraine are in the frontline. I am proud on behalf of the European Museum Academy to have included a report from our national representative in Ukraine, but I am equally sad and distressed to realize the size and depth of the

challenges for museums and cultural heritage at large in Ukraine, the staff and the visitors.

The situation for museums in Europe at the beginning of 2025 is indeed challenging.

Henrik Zipsane

European Museum Academy

COUNTRY REPORTS

ALBANIA

In 2024, Albania's museum sector experienced significant developments, marked by both closures for restoration and the inauguration of new cultural institutions.

National Historical Museum Closure

A pivotal event was the closure of the National Historical Museum in Tirana. As of March 15, 2024, the museum commenced a comprehensive restoration and reconstruction project, scheduled to last until March 15, 2028. This initiative aims to modernize the museum's infrastructure and enhance its exhibition spaces to better preserve and showcase Albania's rich historical artefacts.

In 2024, several of Albania's key museums showcased their cultural significance through unique exhibitions and projects. The National Historical Museum "Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu" in Krujë continued to attract visitors with its immersive exhibits dedicated to Albania's national hero, highlighting Skanderbeg's pivotal role in resisting Ottoman rule. The museum remained a symbol of national pride, though some critics argued for modernizing its presentation techniques to better engage younger audiences. Meanwhile, the National Museum of Medieval Art in Korça stood out for its unparalleled collection of Byzantine icons and religious artefacts, attracting art enthusiasts and scholars alike. Despite its acclaim, calls have been made to expand educational programmes to further connect visitors with Albania's medieval heritage. In Tirana, the Kadare-Agolli Museum, honouring the lives and works of literary giants Ismail Kadare and Dritëro Agolli, offered intimate insights into their contributions to Albanian literature. However, despite the importance of its mission, the museum has faced criticism for its lack of diverse exhibitions and limited curatorial work. Many visitors and cultural commentators have pointed out the need for more dynamic programming and engaging activities to truly bring the legacy of these literary icons to life. Additionally, the absence of interactive elements and innovative presentation methods has been seen as a missed opportunity to create a more vibrant and educational experience for a broader audience.

Local Museum Initiatives

Across the country, local museums undertook various initiatives to preserve and promote Albania's cultural heritage.

Ethnographic Museum of Kruja: Damaged by an earthquake in 2019, the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja reopened its doors to the public in 2024 after extensive restoration efforts. The museum, housed in a traditional Ottoman-era building, offers insights into the daily life, traditions, and customs of the Albanian people.

Albanian Jewish Museum in Vlorë: The Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF) announced plans for the establishment of the Albanian Jewish Museum in Vlorë. This institution aims to honor and preserve the history of the Albanian Jewish community, contributing to the revitalization of Vlorë's historical centre. However, despite the project's early initiation and the enthusiasm surrounding it, progress has been slower than anticipated. Critics have voiced concerns over delays by the weak performance of the Ministry of Culture in its completion, suggesting that this reflects broader challenges in project management and resource allocation. These delays have raised questions about whether sufficient priority is being given to preserving this important facet of Albania's multicultural heritage.

Impact on Tourism and Cultural Engagement

These developments have had a mixed impact on tourism and cultural engagement in Albania. The closure of the National Historical Museum necessitated adjustments in tourist itineraries, with visitors encouraged to explore other cultural sites and local museums throughout the country. Conversely, the reopening of the Ethnographic Museum of Kruja and the forthcoming Albanian Jewish Museum in Vlorë have enriched the cultural landscape, offering new attractions for both locals and tourists.

Conclusion

The year 2024 was transformative for Albania's museums, characterized by significant restoration projects and the introduction of new cultural institutions. These efforts reflect a national commitment to preserving and promoting Albania's rich cultural heritage, ensuring that it remains accessible and engaging for future generations.

Dorian Koçi

AUSTRIA

In recent years, Austrian museums have increasingly positioned themselves as lively places of dialogue and engagement with social issues. Digital technologies, participatory concepts and interdisciplinary approaches are becoming more and more common. At the same time, the preservation of cultural heritage and the cultivation of regional specialities remain a central component of museum work.

AI in the museum

Artificial intelligence has the potential to fundamentally change the museum landscape, both in the way museums manage, conserve or restore their collections and in the way they interact with their audiences. It offers new opportunities for art mediation, education and the expansion of interactive and personalised experiences, but it also poses new challenges in terms of authenticity, copyright and ethical issues. These issues are already being addressed in exhibitions and can stimulate public debate.



Understanding AI, Photo Ars Electronica Birgit Cakir

For example, the Vienna Technical Museum presented the exhibition: Is there AI in it? SMART WORLD How artificial intelligence is changing our world. The exhibition

explores the opposing poles of whether artificial intelligence will destroy millions of jobs or whether its use will usher in a golden age.

https://www.technischesmuseum.at/ausstellung/smart_world

The D#AVANTGARDE project 'AI and Art' was curated by Stephanie Meisl, who was born in Hallein, and David Fisslthaler from Salzburg. In spring 2024, the exhibition explored the possibilities arising from the combination of artistic creation, AI and new media. The focus was on 16 positions by artists who integrated AI into their creative process and used it as a cooperation partner.

<https://www.salzburg.gv.at/themen/kultur/traklhaus/aktuelle-ausstellung/ki-und-die-kunst>

Since 1996, Ars Electronica in Linz-Urfahr has set itself the goal of making the technologies of future generations tangible for all ages in the present. In 2024, 'Understanding AI' will be an exhibition dealing with artificial and human intelligence. The social transformation brought about by artificial intelligence is already in full swing. A basic understanding of this technology is necessary in order to orientate oneself within it. 'Understanding AI' brings together the most important technical aspects of artificial intelligence as well as concrete examples of its application.

<https://ars.electronica.art/center/de/understanding-ai/>

New museums in Austria

A number of new museums opened in 2024, including the Archduke Johann Museum, which opened in the spring at the Stainz Castle site. It is a museum with many original artefacts that is entirely dedicated to the eventful life of Archduke Johann.

The Vienna Actionism Museum opened on 15 March 2024. The museum will present annually changing exhibitions by Brus, Nitsch and Schwarzkogler in Vienna's city centre. The Vienna Actionism Museum (WAM) is the result of an initiative by private collectors. <https://wieneraktionismus.at/>

Albertina opened a new location in Klosterneuburg on 9 April 2024. A large part of the post-1945 collection was made accessible to the public in the former Essl Museum. The focus is on contemporary art after 1945 with pieces from the Albertina's rich collection that will not be on display anywhere else.

Next year, the Bachmann House will open its doors as the 'Ingeborg Bachmann House' literature museum with an exhibition. In June 2024, the first insights into the house, which is currently being renovated and adapted, were given at a festival.

<https://www.albertina.at/albertina-klosterneuburg/ueberuns/albertina-klosterneuburg/>

Few amusement parks are as closely linked to the identity of a city as the Würstelprater is to Vienna. The Prater Museum shows the more than 250-year history of the Viennese amusement park. The Museum is one of the first public wooden buildings in Vienna and a model for the integration of ecological and social sustainability. It celebrates the history of the Würstelprater as a Viennese institution.

<https://www.wienmuseum.at/pratermuseum>



Pratermuseum Wien

After two years of construction, the old local history museum in Bezau was opened as the new Bezau Museum in April 2024. With its new extension, the old Wälderhaus combines everyday history and the present. One half of the museum is an almost 500-year-old Wälderhaus, while the other half is a new building. The museum tells the story of old domestic culture and the strong women of the Bregenzerwald.

<https://www.museum-bezau.at/de>

Financial situation of museums in Austria

The number of visitors to museums continued to show a pleasing upward trend in 2024.

The Austrian government has increased the art and culture budget by 7.8 per cent to 668.8 million euros. Nevertheless, many museums are confronted with cost-cutting measures. This is due to inflation and the economic situation in Austria. The increase in budget is intended to cover inflation as well as priorities such as Fair Pay.

It should be noted that almost 60 per cent of museums in Austria are run on a voluntary basis. They make a major contribution to the cultural landscape in Austria, also have great economic relevance and are an important contribution to tourism. This is because more than half of visitors do not come from the local area.

The new National Council was elected in Austria in September 2024. The results show the Freedom Party of Austria as the party with the most votes, and it remains to be seen what consequences the composition of the new government will have for Austria's cultural landscape.

Nikola Kroath

BELGIUM

1.1 General overview

In order to understand the complex web of museums in Belgium, i.e. the political and administrative levels and decrees they rely on, one would need a comprehensive overview of those structures, which is alas not possible within the limits of this contribution. In what follows I will highlight networks, strategy cycles, evolutions and initiatives for museums in Flanders, in Brussels and in Wallonia in 2024, making largely abstraction from which political level is responsible. As the museum scene in Flanders is my natural habitat, news from this front will stand out in comparison.

1.2 ICOM België/Belgique

Belgium hosts two national sub-sections of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM-International): ICOM Belgique/Wallonie-Bruxelles (<https://icom-wb.museum>) and ICOM Belgium Flanders (www.icom-belgium-flanders.be). Together they form the ICOM Belgium Committee. Alexandre Chevalier is currently chair of ICOM Belgique/WallonieBruxelles, Isabelle Vanhoonacker is his counterpart at ICOM Belgium Flanders.

1.3 museumPASSmusées

museumPASSmusées is the largest museum pass in Belgium. Museums in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels are pulling together for the project, which is quite unique in the Belgian context. The purpose of the pass is twofold: to raise the visibility of the institutions on the one hand and to lower the threshold to culture on the other. The management of the pass sits with the recognised cvso museumPASSmusées established by four organisations: the Brussels Museums Council, the Flemish Museum Network, ICOM Belgique/Wallonie-Bruxelles/Musées et Société en Wallonie and publiq vzw. Director is Erika T'Jaeckx. Pass holders get one-year access to all participating Belgian museums. That means visiting the permanent exhibitions of more than 255 museums for free. One can also visit temporary exhibitions for free or at a substantial discount.

In 2024 the museum pass generated 1.300.000 museum visits (2023: 972.845). The portfolio now includes 255 participating museums (2023: 241). The pass ended 2024 with 210.000 active passholders (2023: 176.615). 75% of these are Dutch-speaking, 25% French-speaking, 73% come from Flanders, 19% from Brussels and 8% from Wallonia. More information via: www.museumpassmusees.be.

2 Museums in Flanders

2.1 General overview and funding

In Flanders one can distinguish between the following categories of museums subsidised by the Flemish Government:

- cultural institutions (standing out internationally)
- national museums
- supralocal museums
- Flemish cultural institutions (co-organised by the Flemish government).

Apart from that the Flemish landscape counts local museums ranging from small city or village museums to museums that are cared for by local heritage organisations. Some of them are subsidised or sustained by a local authority.

All the above museums except those at the local level are powered by the Flemish Ministry of Culture and its administration, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media.

For the cultural institutions, the national museums and the supralocal museums in Flanders 2024 was the first year of a new five-year strategy cycle: 2024-2028. In autumn 2023 the Flemish government decided to allocate 25 million euros extra to the domain of cultural heritage including the museums for the policy period 2024-2028. 50 museums were accredited for a total of 30.078.000 euro per annum. Only one museum was credited with the recently introduced label of 'cultural institution', that is the Bruges Museum, consisting of 13 museums across Bruges, amongst which are the Gruuthuse and Sint-Janshospitaal.

The Flemish cultural institutions – KMSKA, M HKA, Mu.ZEE, Kasteel van Gaasbeek and Roger Raveelmuseum – follow a separate application procedure and timing (2026-2030).

Next to the subsidised circuit there exist private museums or museum-like initiatives, for example the Cobra Depot, created by top-ranked entrepreneur Fernand Huts and his wife, Karine Vandenheuvel, both collectors.

2.2 The Flemish Museum Network

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

The Flemish Museum Network was established 12 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, 50 museums participate in the XL meetings. There is a very broad representation of the Flemish museum 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 2024 the Flemish Museum Network organised 7 meetings, of which 4 XL online meetings with all museums recognised by the Flemish community (both basic recognition, supralocal and national recognition). These meetings were attended by over 50 museums. The emphasis in these digital meetings was on sharing information. In addition, there were 2 IRL meetings with the directors of 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 via reporting and offering meeting infrastructure, FARO gave a support highly appreciated by all participants.

2.3 Flemish Virtual Museum

March 12, 2024 FAAM (Flanders All Around Museum), was launched. FAAM is a digital project from the Flemish Government 2019-2023 that shares content from Flemish museums and other heritage organisations large and small with a broad audience via both a website and an app. Museums are encouraged to share their content and create experiences that are attractive to a broad audience and/or specific target groups. More information via: <https://www.faam.vlaanderen/nl>.

2.4 New developments and exhibitions

In 2024, several significant events and developments in the Flemish museum scene captured attention, ranging from notable exhibitions to new initiatives and museum openings. Here are some key highlights.

2.4.1 Ensor Year 2024

2024 was a year highlighting Belgian avant-garde artist James Ensor (1860-1849), who died 75 years earlier. Dozens of exhibitions, festivals and events around Ensor and his work were organised for a year from December 2023 until early 2025 in the Belgian

cities of Ostend, Antwerp and Brussels. Participating museums were a.o. Mu.ZEE, Modemuseum Antwerpen, KMSKA, Bozar, the Belgian Royal Library, Plantin Moretus Museum and Fotomuseum Antwerpen.

2.4.2 Restorations, refurbishments, closures

End of 2024 the Rubenshuis re-opened partially. The renovation and reopening of the 17th century city palazzo in the heart of Antwerp will take place in phases. The historic artist's residence is temporarily closed for restoration. The garden, however, has been restored in the spirit of Rubens and in the house the cellar hosts a Rubens Experience, while the library and shop have been re-opened as well.

In the Open Air Museum Bokrijk an eight year-long restoration procedure of 124 historic buildings was completed. Apart from restoring the historic vernacular architecture the museum focused on safeguarding the craftsmanship related as well as organising a major community participation effort by inviting, one by one, all the heritage communities around each of the buildings and small landscape elements.

In Ghent the Design Museum is still closed due to a major restoration and Mu.ZEE in Ostend closed its doors at the end of the year for a major restoration procedure.

3 Museums in Brussels

3.1 General overview

The museums in Brussels counted 5.018.000 visitors in 2024, down slightly from 2023, the record year to date. These good figures require some nuance: while some museums recorded a rise in visitor numbers, others experienced a sharp drop. Monthly visitor numbers fell significantly in April and even more so in July and August, recovering again in September. The good results are mainly due to the return of international tourists to Brussels. Established events such as the Nocturnes and Museum Night Fever also contributed significantly to the increase in museum visits, as did the Brussels Card and the Art Nouveau Pass. The large-scale communication around the Surrealism-themed year played a role in these positive results as well.

Two museums had a record year: the Plantentuin Meise and the Boghossian Foundation. In addition, several other museums also did very well, including Bozar, the Design Museum, the Migration Museum and the Erasmus House. In contrast, other museums received fewer visitors, due to external factors, amongst which the many roadworks, the gloomy weather and possibly also the effect of the Olympics in Paris.

Finally, financial uncertainties also played a role, due to the absence of governments at regional and federal level since the 9 June elections.

3.2 Brussels Museums

Brussels Museums (www.brussel museums.be) is the federation that brings together circa 125 museums in the Brussels Capital Region.

The central mission of Brussels Museums is to:

- connect museums by facilitating meetings, exchanging good practices and passing on up-to-date sector information.
- represent and defend the interests of museums as the reference partner, examining the impact and challenges of the sector (cf. Brussels Museums memorandum).
- increase the visibility of museums through public events and communication actions, such as Museum Night Fever and Nocturnes projects.
- guide museums towards greater accessibility, inclusiveness and sustainability with initiatives such as Open Museum and Green Museum.

3.3 New developments and exhibitions

As mentioned above, Bozar hosted a major retrospective of James Ensor. The museum was also engaged in ongoing efforts to renovate and modernize its facilities, enhancing visitor experiences while preserving the historical significance of its collections.

The René Magritte Museum, part of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, focused on sustainable curatorial practices. In 2024, the museum presented exhibitions that engaged with themes of surrealism in contemporary contexts, exploring the influence of Magritte on modern artistic movements.

4 Museums in Wallonia

4.1 General overview

Museums in Wallonia can be grouped into various categories based on their management, funding, and/or thematic focus. The key organisational structures include:

- public museums: museums supported by the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, which provides funding, guidelines, and recognition.
- provincial and municipal museums: many museums are managed at the provincial or local level, receiving support from Walloon provinces or city councils.
- private and independent museums: run by non-profit organizations, foundations, or private entities. For example, smaller regional museums focusing on local heritage.

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB - www.culture.be) officially recognises over 150 museums under the umbrella term 'Musées de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles', ensuring quality standards in management, conservation, and education. For more information, see:

<https://patrimoineculturel.cfwb.be/reconnaisances-subventions/musees>.

4.2 New developments and exhibitions

Successful exhibitions were a.o. the Auguste Rodin Exhibition at BAM (Beaux-Arts Mons), as well as the new initiative P.A.R.C. Museum Network Launch, a collaborative network encompassing eight museums over a 26 km² area, housing approximately 12.000 artworks. This initiative aimed to highlight contemporary masterpieces, industrial heritage, and surrealist art, offering visitors a comprehensive cultural experience.

The Museum of Tapestries and Textile Arts in Tournai (TAMAT) underwent significant renovations and was temporarily closed until the end of 2024.

Hilde Schoefs

BULGARIA

For the first time in decades, more than one new museum appeared in Bulgaria in 2024, and significant existing exhibitions were renovated. With the help of national and European funding, the museums in city of Pazardzhik and Ispereh renovated their archaeological exhibitions, in Sliven they renovated the exhibitions and buildings of three house-museums, in Gabrovo the Historical museum and 'Etar' - an open-air museum, have new exhibitions. In town of Tutrakan, next to the military cemetery, a new museum with a digital panorama for a memorable battle from 1916 was built. Two other regional museums - in Shumen and Vratsa, are changing part of their exhibitions, with funding from other programmes. Although sporadic, these renovations are a breath of fresh air in an environment where there has been no development for a long time.

In 2024, the Association of Bulgarian Museums is trying to negotiate better conditions for financing museums in our country, but the dialogue is difficult due to the lack of a regular government and frequent parliamentary elections. After the analysis of the Ministry of Finance in 2022, which showed that a large part of the museums in Bulgaria are not active, do not work with audiences and do not have their own income, groups were formed to develop criteria for assessing the activities of museums related to financing. This activity has not ended.

And! This year we will consider the contribution of the Ministry of Culture to the implementation of the museum policy, which opens programmes for conservation and restoration, for activities with audiences, as well as for designing new exhibitions. In the projects for this year, the amounts in some areas reach 70,000 euros per project, without the need for co-financing. Thus, museums are stimulated to be active and many took advantage of the opportunity provided to them. The results of these competitions will be released next year, when the activities will also be implemented. In 2024, for the first time, a Bulgarian museum – the Rousse Regional Museum of History, won the award of the Forum for Slavic Cultures – The Best Slavic Museum. 'Ancient Thrace and the Classical World' is an exhibition at the Getty Villa Museum in Los Angeles, featuring exhibits from Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece. 'Luxury and Power: From Persia to Greece' is an exhibition at the British Museum, featuring the Thracian gold treasure from Panagyurishte. Another exhibition that periodically receives wide attention for its inspiring example of a new reading of the common history of the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe in the distant past is 'The First Kings of Europe', shown this year at the Canadian Museum of History Gatineau, QC, Canada.

The agreed opportunities for funding museum activities and for the renovation of buildings and exhibitions, as well as for the digitization of museum exhibits shared on a common platform, which are tied to the EU's Next Generation Recovery and Resilience Plan, supported by the European Commission, have not yet been implemented.

The analysis for 2024 shows that museums work on their own, have difficulty finding support, and rarely seek partners. This type of (self)isolation is caused by the lack of clear goals and vision for development, by the distancing of municipal authorities from the financing of museums, and by the lack of a critical stance towards the cultural product being created.

Nikolay Nenov

CROATIA

In the year 2024, several museums were reopened in Croatia - on two bases. Some reopened after repairing the building due to the damage caused by the Zagreb earthquake in 2020, and some opened their new permanent exhibitions. In several cases both were carried out, so that for the first time in 2024 a quarter of the museums in Croatia were repairing and renovating the building and at the same time (mostly in Zagreb) working on the new permanent exhibitions.

As 15 out of 22 museums under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Media have been in some phase of preparation and creation of new permanent exhibitions, due to the large number of post-earthquake reconstruction projects, energy projects or other projects co-financed by European Union funds, the Ministry of Culture and Media, in cooperation with the MDC, held a roundtable discussion on the challenges of creating permanent museum exhibitions on 22 January 2024. The creation of new permanent exhibitions is recognized as one of the greatest challenges.

Of the museums established by the Ministry in Zagreb and the surrounding area, a total of seven institutions damaged by the earthquake are currently undergoing extensive reconstruction, for which more than 110 million euros have been secured from the National Reconstruction and Resilience Plan. These are the Croatian Museum of Naive Art, the Croatian Historical Museum in two locations, the Mimara Museum, the Meštrović Studio, the National Museum of Modern Art, the Klovićevi Dvori Gallery and the Museums of Croatian Zagorje. In December, contracts were awarded for 72 projects for major reconstruction of public buildings worth almost €500 million, including numerous museum buildings - the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the Art Pavilion, the buildings of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

In September 2024, after three years of intensive work, the Croatian Museum of Natural History reopened - four times larger than before the earthquake. This was one of the largest investments in a museum in the whole of Croatia. The complete renovation and extension of the historic Amadeo Palace, new exhibition spaces and a hall dug under the museum, a glazed atrium, an earthquake-resistant building - a project worth more than 30 million euros - has given this museum house more space for permanent exhibitions, new rooms and laboratories for specialist staff, space for temporary exhibitions, events, a museum café and a museum shop. In the laboratories, users will be able to follow live scientific analyses and contribute to the creation of new scientific values. Some of the scientific activities will be open to the public in collaboration with educational institutions, allowing students to work actively and contribute to their scientific literacy. The museum's new permanent exhibition is

spread over 39 rooms on three floors of the museum and is based on a comprehensive interpretation of the museum's objects from the mineralogical-petrographic, geological-paleontological, palaeoanthropological, zoological and botanical collections. Through the contextualisation of the 5,000 objects on display, the diversity of the living and non-living world is brought closer to the visitor, and with the help of modern multimedia solutions, interactive content and reconstructions, the visitor is given an answer to the question "What is life and how did it originate?"

Another museum that opened last year is the Croatian Sports Museum in Zagreb. The museum is dedicated to the history and development of sport and physical culture in Croatia. The museum works on systematic collection, preservation, restoration and conservation, presentation and permanent protection of museum materials from the area of the museum's jurisdiction. The main task of the museum institution is the systematic collection, study and presentation of goods from the field of sport and physical culture.

In Velika Gorica, the Turopolje Museum Interpretation Centre has opened, which includes a museum store and office space, as well as space for the museum's educational and andragogical activities. The interactive display in the large multifunctional hall, which is the main part of the Visitor Centre, offers all the natural, geographical, historical and tourist attractions and interesting things of Turopolje (a region south of Zagreb) in one place.

The Local History Museum of Našice opened the first phase of its permanent exhibition after extensive renovation of the palace in which it is located. This part is dedicated to the culture of life of the noble Pejačević family (the previous owners of the palace) at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when they were at the height of their power, and to the time when Dora Pejačević, the first Croatian modern composer, who lived and worked there. The story of the Pejačević family has been chosen as the main narrative in the first part of the permanent exhibition, while in the second phase the museum will also present the rest of the cultural, historical and natural heritage of Našice and the Našice region.

More than four years after the Zagreb earthquake, the renovation of the permanent exhibition and the repair of the damage, the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb has fully reopened its doors. The renovation was carried out in several stages on the different floors of the building, thus gradually bringing parts of the museum into operation and increasing the mechanical resistance of individual parts of the building to level three. The Egyptian, Ancient and Medieval collections were restored to their original state in March 2020, with modifications to improve seismic safety, and two

temporary exhibitions were created - the Prehistoric and Numismatic collections, which could not be restored to their original state due to irreparable damage.

In addition to rehabilitation, intensive restoration of damaged monuments and objects was carried out - damage was recorded on 178 museum artefacts, of which 109 required very complex conservation and restoration interventions.

There are several newly opened centres for the interpretation of local heritage, but one of them stands out: the House of Halubje Bell Ringers in Viškovo (close to Rijeka), dedicated to the rustic carnival ritual of processions with bells. This tradition is included in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The project was largely community-based, and the holders of the tradition were involved in the museological interpretation at all stages of the project. The permanent exhibition offers many interactive and sensory opportunities, areas for children, a restaurant with local food, rooms for the bellringers' association, an archive, etc. It is housed in a new building specially designed for the purpose and is surrounded by a theme park related to the content of the centre.

Coincidentally or not, several projects in museums and galleries were dedicated to the role of women in different contexts. In March, the International Conference 'Women Artists and Museums: Towards a New Museum of Women Artists in Zagreb', where prominent theoreticians, researchers and curators spoke about women's and gender museums, their role in today's society, but also about feminism in museums and the ways in which museums can become platforms for promoting social equality. The Rijeka Museum of Modern Art opened the exhibition 'WHERE IS WOMEN'S PLACE? - Women in Modern Art', which featured works from the museum's collection from the early 20th century to 1970 that depict women and provide insight into their identities, roles and creativity, reflecting social norms and the position of women at the time. The Nikola Tesla Technical Museum in Zagreb hosted the exhibition 'Work and Resistance - The Case of the Textile Industry', which affirmed the role of textile workers in the labour movement, as well as their contribution to women's struggle for equal rights in all areas of public and private life, from the end of the 19th century, when the first trade union branches were formed, to the tragedy of transformation and privatisation. The Klovićevi dvori in Zagreb hosted the exhibition 'One for All - All for One' - about forgotten Croatian women artists. It dealt with the phenomenon of the first association of women artists in this region, which has been unjustly neglected and marginalised in Croatian art history. The exhibition 'Plavica - Fish Processing Factory - Cres' was organised in Rijeka, which brought visitors closer to the history of the factory, which was the centre of the local community for more than a hundred years,

where women worked, the history of women's solidarity, hope for a better future and pride in their own work.

Some statistics: The founders of museums in Croatia are cities (60%), the state (14.7%), counties (7.6%), municipalities (4.7%), other founders (10.6%) and multiple founders (2.3%), including museums founded jointly by the state and a city, and by a county and a city.

The museums are divided by type into general museums (84 or 40.4% of the total number of official museums and collections in the Republic of Croatia), then specialised museums (a total of 99 or 47.6%), which in turn are divided into archaeological (6%), ethnographic (4%), historical (5.3%), natural history (2.4%), technical (1.4%), artistic (15.4%) and other (14.4%), then museum collections (22 or 10.5%) and a permanent museum exhibition (0.5%).

Among the specialised museums (101) by type, most are art museums (32 or 31.7%), followed by archaeological museums (12 or 11.8%), historical museums (11 or 10.9%), ethnographic museums (8 or 7.9%), natural history museums (5 or 4.95%), three technical museums (2.97% of specialised museums) and other specialised museums (almost 30%), including biographical, memorial, hunting, police, sports, school, postal, sacral, typological, etc.). According to OREG, the total number of employees in museums in 2023 was 1,856. Of these, 725 are administrative, accounting, technical and support staff, and 1,131 are professional museum workers and other professional staff (excluding trainees). The average age of professional museum staff is 47 years, and the gender ratio is largely in favour of female colleagues, who make up 65% of the museum workforce, compared to male colleagues, who make up 35%.

When it comes to museum visits, the city of Pula in Istria is, somewhat surprisingly, in first place, with its three museums - the Archaeological Museum of Istria, the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria - attracting 752,000 visitors. Thus, the largest Istrian city, which not so long ago was threatened by economic stagnation, has shown how a qualitative leap towards sustainable tourism can be made by reviving the rich heritage of the Roman Empire and using the Austro-Hungarian fortification heritage. The city of Zagreb came second with 712,000 visits to museums, while Dubrovnik came third with 621,000 visits, with another heritage institution - the Dubrovnik Art Gallery - achieving a record number of visitors, with 74,000 users taking part in its programme activities.

Lidija Nikočević

CYPRUS

Cyprus, a Mediterranean island with a rich cultural heritage, has long been a crossroads of Eastern and Western civilizations. In 2024, the island's museum and art scene continued to thrive, showcasing a blend of ancient history, modern creativity, and dynamic contemporary art. From classical artefacts to avant-garde exhibitions, the Cypriot art scene is vibrant and evolving. This report provides an overview of the most significant trends and developments in the museums and art world of Cyprus as of 2024. Notably, 2024 marks the 50th anniversary of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, a momentous event that continues to shape the island's political, social, and cultural landscape. This anniversary has also influenced the themes and exhibitions seen across the Cypriot museum and art scene this year.

One of the most significant exhibitions of 2024 is *Cyprus Insula: History – Memory – Reality*, organized by the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation. Running from 4 July 2024 to 30 July 2025, this exhibition offers a deep exploration of the island's complex and multi-layered history. Presented in five acts, each act focuses on a distinct period or aspect of Cypriot life, yet all are united by the overarching theme of insularity. The exhibition aims to capture the essence of Cyprus as an island shaped by its unique geography, cultural influences, and historical experiences. By examining Cyprus' unified cultural character—blending elements from antiquity to the modern era—the exhibition explores how the island's identity has been forged across time, amid moments of both unity and division. Through its interactive and thought-provoking format, *Cyprus Insula* invites visitors to reflect on the evolution of the island's identity, shaped by external influences, internal struggles, and, notably, the scars left by the Turkish invasion.

The A. G. Leventis Gallery chose to engage with the theme through the work of the Cypriot artist Telemachos Kanthos (1910-1993). Focusing on two key subjects in Kanthos's oeuvre—the 'Women's Bazaar' and the 'Hard Years' series—the exhibition *Kanthos - The Sharp Edges of History* presented fresh perspectives on Cyprus's complex history. It aimed to highlight Kanthos's personal engagement with the historical realities of the island during the period he worked, opening up space for questions about how history is understood and how art plays a role in shaping that understanding. By focusing on these two seemingly unrelated themes, the exhibition encouraged viewers to reconsider a topic many might feel they already know, offering new insights into the island's historical and social fabric. In parallel, the A. G. Leventis Gallery organized *Reflections*, an exhibition born from a 'Call for Art – Contemporary Art Competition'. This exhibition invited Cypriot artists to propose works reflecting on or marked by the historical and cultural memory of the events leading up to the division of the island in 1974.

Another exhibition that opened at the Nicosia Municipal Art Centre (NIMAC) in December 2024 is *Repetitive Acts: The Power of Weaving and Textile in Contemporary Art*. This exhibition explores the enduring significance of weaving as a medium of communication, storytelling, and resistance. From ancient Peruvian textiles to contemporary Afghan 'War Rugs', textiles have long served as powerful, silent transmitters of meaning and memory. It brings the legacy of weaving into the present, showcasing how contemporary artists in Cyprus are transforming this traditional craft into a space for political, cultural, and personal expression. By emphasizing the act of making, the repetitive patterns, and the ritual of repetition in the process of weaving, the exhibition underscores how these elements can function as powerful tools for personal and collective storytelling. It explores how weaving can transcend its domestic associations to become a space for resistance and social commentary, particularly in the context of Cyprus's complex political and cultural history.

The museums and art scene in Cyprus in 2024 is dynamic and diverse, with both historical institutions and contemporary galleries reflecting the island's unique blend of cultures, histories, and artistic innovations. The 50th anniversary of the 1974 Turkish invasion has provided a poignant backdrop to many exhibitions and performances, highlighting themes of division, reconciliation, and shared memory. Through exhibitions like the aforementioned, Cypriot artists and curators are engaging with the past in nuanced and complex ways, encouraging both local and international audiences to reflect on the island's multifaceted history.

From the classical collections at the Cyprus Museum to the cutting-edge exhibitions from private institutions, Cyprus is positioning itself as an increasingly important center for art in the Mediterranean region. The island's rich historical heritage, combined with a thriving contemporary art scene, makes it a unique cultural hub. As Cyprus continues to embrace its dual heritage and contemporary creative voices, its cultural sector remains a vital part of the global art scene, contributing to important conversations about memory, identity, and the role of art in societal healing and transformation.

Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

CZECH REPUBLIC

In 2024, a number of important museum expositions and exhibitions, as well as several interesting conferences, were created in the Czech Republic. Mostly their attention turned to **people, their memory and legacy**. A truly exceptional realization that deserves international attention is the Roma Holocaust Memorial in Lety u Písek, which is run by The Museum of Romani Culture. Many exhibition projects were inspired by the **anniversaries** of the birth or death of personalities such as Franz Kafka, Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Bohumil Hrabal, and the expositions generally focused on the presentation of life and through it only present their work, but also the influence these famous creators had on art up to the present day. During the year, several expositions and exhibitions dealing with **nature** were also opened. With regard to climate change and the need to draw public attention to the alarming state of nature, this is a path in an important direction. Last but not least, museum visitors were a topic of the conference organised by the City of Ostrava Museum.

Debt repayment

Memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia at Lety u Písku, The Museum of Romani Culture

In the Czech Republic, great attention has been paid in recent years to the construction and repair of memorials to the victims of World War II. These have always been remarkable achievements, and it is no different in the case of the Memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia at Lety u Písku run by The Museum of Romani Culture, which stands out for its significance not only within the Czech Republic, but also in the international context.

A labour camp was established near the small village of Lety in 1940 and from 1942 it functioned as a Gypsy Camp. A number of prisoners were deported to the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp, but many died in 1943 when a typhus epidemic broke out in the camp. The dead were buried in shallow graves in the forest about half a kilometre from the camp. In August 1943, the camp was closed and liquidated. 1,294 people passed through the camp, only about 300 survived. After the war, the Roma erected a wooden cross on the site. However, no one paid attention to the Romani commemoration. In the 1970s, a large-capacity pig farm was built on the site. After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 and the restoration of democracy in Czechoslovakia (since 1993 in the Czech Republic), attention has finally turned to the Romani Holocaust Memorial at Lety. In 1995, President Václav Havel unveiled a monument by sculptor Zdeněk Hůla at the site of the mass graves of the victims. However, the camp grounds still remained part of the pig farm. This has attracted international criticism. The Czech political representation therefore decided to address the problem, but it was not until

2018 that the entire pig farm was purchased. The Ministry of Culture has entrusted the site to the administration of the Museum of Romani Culture, which has prepared a competition for an architectural design. The preparation of the tender procedure was already debated with both experts and representatives of the Romani communities. This broad group of stakeholders also became members of the jury. They chose the design of the architectural studio Terra Florida (Jan Sulzer, Lucie Vogelová) and the studio Světlík.

The solution of Terra Florida studio is unique in its concept. It works not only with building materials, but also nature and, above all, time is part of the project. The whole area is designed succinctly as a concrete line and a circle in the landscape. A straight line is a path. It starts at the new museum building with an exhibition and very important spaces for education and leads through the entire area of the former pig farm to the circle. The circle describes the ground plan of the former camp and is equipped with steel strips with the names of the camp victims. Several unpaved roads also weave through the area, passing the walls of one of the 14 giant pigsties and commemorating another dark chapter of the camp at Lety u Písku. Another path leads to a memorial site with the graves of dead Romani people. The whole area is now a plain, but that will change. 16000 tiny trees planted there will grow over the years, connect with the surrounding forest and heal the wound in our past. The past will be reminded only by the meadow inside the circle, where a camp once stood, and people died.

<https://www.rommuz.cz/en/lety-u-pisku/present-days/lety-u-pisku-memorial-to-the-holocaust-of-the-roma-and-sinti-in-bohemia/>

Memorials to important personalities

The year 2024 was the year of the anniversaries of important Czech personalities whose work influenced the development of culture around the world.

Franz Kafka (03/07/1883 – 03/06/1924)

The most famous is undoubtedly Franz Kafka. A world-famous representative of German literary Prague. A lawyer by training, he worked in the Prague branches of Assicurazioni Generali (Generali Insurance Company proudly acknowledged its former employee Franz Kafka in its marketing campaigns last year) and the Workers' Accident Insurance Company. Many institutions have prepared at least a lecture or a small exhibition. The three largest projects were implemented by the DOX Gallery of Fine Arts, Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen and the Museum of Literature.

Since 2005, the Franz Kafka Museum in the centre of Prague in Prague's Lesser Town has been informing the public about the life of Franz Kafka. Its activities were followed by the Museum of Literature with the project 'The Plays of Franz Kafka'. Its authors drew on Kafka's diaries and correspondence and sought to demolish the cliché that

Franz Kafka was "a man tired of the world who was consumed by bizarre fantasies". The famous writer practised a free, playful approach to the existential anxiety he experienced, and after all, he was a relatively active athlete himself.

<https://www.muzeumliteratury.cz/hry-franze-kafky>

Franz Kafka's relationship to the visual arts and visual culture of his time was presented in the exhibition 'Through the Eyes of Franz Kafka: Between Image and Language'. Kafka was intensively interested in fine arts. He was a skilled draughtsman himself – his notebooks from the time of his studies are full of caricature drawings. He was interested not only in high art images, but also in expressions of popular culture, including picture magazines and posters, films, photography, dance, circus and cabaret. The variety of images that surrounded Kafka in his everyday life is presented in the exhibition through works of various media. At the same time, he answers the question of how Kafka's visual experiences could have been reflected in the language of his texts. The exhibition was prepared by the Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen in cooperation with the Adalbert Stifter Verein and the Jewish Museum in Prague.

<https://www.zpc-galerie.cz/en/through-eyes-franz-kafka-between-image-and-language>

An excellent project was presented by the DOX contemporary art gallery. The KAFKAesque exhibition focuses on the reflection of Kafka's work and poetics in contemporary art. It does not offer a historical view of his work, but a view that reflects our current situation with all its complexities and ambiguities. The work of more than 30 internationally renowned artists shows that Kafka's work, with its references to existential fears and personal anxieties, is highly relevant to our time. A rich accompanying programme and many educational programmes not only for children and youth were prepared for the exhibition.

<https://www.dox.cz/program/kafkaesque>

Antonín Dvořák (08/09/1841 – 01/05/1904)

Birth house in Nelahozeves, The House of Lobkowitz

One of the most important Czech composers and the world's most played Czech composer ever, Dvořák was a pioneer of Czech modern music. He conducted all over the world, including the Royal Albert Hall in London. From 1892 to 1895 he worked in the USA and his task was to help find a 'face' for American music. Dvořák was fascinated by Native American and Afro-American music, which inspired him for his own work, that he included into classical music not only in America, but later also on the Old Continent. His 9th Symphony, also called From the New World, is the pinnacle of his work and was also considered to become the anthem of the USA. There are several museums in the Czech Republic that commemorate the activities of Antonín Dvořák. In 2024, a new museum was opened in his birthplace in Nelahozeves. The house belongs to the House of Lobkowitz. The noble Lobkowitz family was itself in

exile in the USA during the communist totalitarian regime in the second half of the 20th century, which makes them all the closer to Dvořák. The newly opened exhibition delves into the period of Dvořák's childhood in the family of wealthy butcher and, in the spirit of the teachings of Sigmund Freud, discovers how the first years of his life influenced Dvořák's work. Since 1951, the Dvořák's Nelahozeves classical music festival has been held here. <https://www.lobkowicz.cz/en/antonin-dvorak-birth-house>

Bedřich Smetana (02/03/1824 – 12/05/1884)

Birth place in Litomyšl, The Litomyšl Region Museum

Czech composer of the Romantic period. In his work, he strove to create a distinctive Czech musical style based on domestic folk and contemporary world stimuli, and he is considered the father of Czech national music. His opera *The Bartered Bride* and the cycle of symphonic poems *My Country* are among the highlights of his work. In 2024, the exhibition 'Bedřich Smetana's Birthplace' was opened in Litomyšl. It is located in the area of a former brewery, where his father was a brewer. The exhibition is in the authentic environment of the Smetana family's apartment. The exhibition consists of two parts, the first consists of a music salon that offers a musical-visual experience. The second part is a reconstruction of an apartment equipped with historical furniture and accessories from the Biedermeier period. Since 1946, Litomyšl has hosted the Smetana's Litomyšl music festival. <https://www.rbbs.cz/en/>

Bohumil Hrabal (28/03/1914 – 03/02/1997)

Own Cottage, The Polabí Region Museum

Bohumil Hrabal was the most important Czech prose writer of the late 20th century. He studied law, but had various jobs – he was a worker in a steel mill, waiter, dispatcher, clerk, packer of waste paper in scrap yards, stage technician, and from 1963 a writer. After 1968 he was temporarily banned by communist regime from publishing, and his works were published in samizdat [underground publications] or abroad. From 1975 he was again allowed to freely create and publish books. The basic contribution of his mostly short prose is the presentation of the colloquial stream, common language and the common man as a non-pathetic hero. Irony, humour, sharp editing and perfectly captured details create a reader-friendly space in which the author uninhibitedly alternates pub talk with philosophical sentences, folk wisdom with the precepts of art historians. He has influenced a number of filmmakers, including the dissident and President Václav Havel, and director Jiří Menzel has made a number of films based on his books, which belong to the golden fund of Czech cinematography. The 1966 film *Closely Watched Trains* was awarded an Oscar. Born in Brno, he grew up in Nymburk and lived in Prague. He had a cottage near Nymburk in Kersko, where he kept cats and met important personalities such as Václav Havel. The cottage was for sale in 2021, purchased by the Central Bohemian Region and entrusted to the care of the Museum of the Elbe River. In 2024, the cottage was inaugurated after reconstruction. However, work is still underway to retrofit it, and

the museum is working with the general public community to do so.
<https://www.polabskemuzeum.cz/mista/hrabalova-chata-kersko>

Nature – Landscape - People

The Pálava House of Nature, Mikulov Regional Museum

The extensive reconstruction and completion of the building of the former archaeological museum in Dolní Věstonice created a visitor centre of the Pálava Protected Landscape Area with a modern interactive exhibition. It presents Pálava as a place with an extraordinary species diversity of rare plants and animals. It also shows how people have shaped the local landscape for millennia (the landscape was shaped by mammoth hunters and the oldest ceramic sculpture in the world, the so-called Venus of Věstonice), was created here by their farming and explains why the behaviour of residents and visitors is crucial for preserving the beauty and diversity of Pálava. The exhibition combines 'traditional' museum approaches (dermoplastic, zoological and botanical preparations, photographs and illustrations) with modern elements such as projections on a model of the Pálava Hills, animal sounds, interactive digital telescopes, recordings of witnesses and short documentary films. The operation of the building includes educational programmes for schools, excursions and events for the public. <https://www.dumprirody.cz/palava/>

Conference Creation and Evaluation of Exhibitions III: Do We Know Our Visitors?

The City of Ostrava Museum

Last but not least, it is necessary to mention the conference activities. Of these, the international professional conference 'Creation and Evaluation of Exhibitions III: Do We Know Our Visitors?' (12.–14. 6. 2024). The conference was organized by The City of Ostrava Museum in cooperation with the AMG Historical Commission, the National Museum of Agriculture, the Institute for the Interpretation of Local Heritage, MUSEum+ and under the auspices of the Minister of Culture Martin Baxa and the Deputy Mayor of the City of Ostrava Lucie Baránková Vilamová. The conference was attended by speakers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Spain. During the three conference days, lectures, workshops and discussions touched mainly on the relationship between museums and their visitors, the possibilities of visitor surveys and methodologies with the aim of bringing museums as close as possible to their visitors, increasing their comfort and learning about their needs, requirements and expectations. The results of the conference and the established cooperation became one of the foundations of OM's further work on the preparation of new permanent exhibitions, but also in the new overall concept of the museum as a visitor-oriented institution.

<https://www.ostrmuz.cz/website/mainmenu/stranka-akcien/2024/webpage/>

Martina Lehmannová

DENMARK

2024 was a year with many visitors to Danish museums - more than 17 million visitors in a country with less than 6 million citizens - and a new framework for state subsidies to the state-recognized museums in Denmark.

In December 2024, a new museum reform was passed, which contained a new way of calculating the subsidy for the country's 95 state-recognized museums. This group of museums covers most major museums in Denmark. In addition to the 95 state-recognized museums, there are five state-owned museums and a number of private museums.

There are three elements in the new way of allocating grants to state-recognized museums: a basic grant, an incentive grant and a priority grant. In connection with the reform, DKK 75 million was added to the museums, so that a total of DKK 565.7 million is now given in annual operating grants to the 95 state-recognized museums.

The distribution of the funds among the three elements was as follows:

64.2% of the funds are given as a basic grant after a judgment of the importance of the collections of the museums. The grants are distributed with a base amount according to categories: Local significance (DKK 1.5 million), Regional significance (DKK 2.5 million), National significance (DKK 3.5 million), Special national significance (DKK 10.5 million) and international significance (DKK 21 million). **23.9%** of the funds are currently distributed as a variable incentive-based grant element, which is divided according to four parameters: 1) visitors (30 % of the grant element), 2) children and youth (30 % of the grant element), 3) income, e.g. consisting of grants, including municipal grants and grants from foundations, and admission fees (30 % of the grant element), and 4) peer-reviewed research publications (10 % of the grant element). **11.9%** is currently distributed as priority grants to selected museums. These funds are politically prioritized to several selected museums.

There was a great deal of debate in connection with the reform. In general, the museums and The Association of Danish Museums (ODM) were satisfied with the additional funding. With the new distribution, approximately 70 % of museums will receive a larger grant. However, there was criticism of a lack of transparency and clarity in the argumentation regarding which basic grants individual museums will

receive in the future. However, museums will later be able to appeal to a newly established Museum Council, set up by the Minister of Culture.

Another topic of debate was whether the reform will lead to new and changed priorities in museums, including the importance of the incentive element of the grant, where museums will receive funding according to visitor numbers, young visitors, research and own income. Time will tell whether more museums will seek to prioritise these parts of their work over other tasks, or whether more influence will be sought to increase the basic grant in relation to the museum's collection. The full agreement can be read here, in Danish:

https://kum.dk/fileadmin/kum/1_Nyheder_og_presse/2024/Aftaletekst.pdf

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.

In 2024 the museum team of the Heritage Protection Board started the follow-up analysis of the Heritage Protection Act, within the framework of which were also evaluated the results of activities related to museums. A new museum field strategy was prepared, which creates a clear view of the tasks arising from the law, cooperation agreements, and development needs. Also, the plans for 2025 were mapped together with the Museum Association, ICOM Estonia, the Union of Museums and the Ministry of Culture, which helped to get a comprehensive overview of the new year trends in the museum field. The major focuses in 2025 are crisis preparation, initiating museum digitization projects, promoting the involvement of private funding, and the analysis of the national collection policy of museums.

Visits

In 2023 there were about 2,5 million museum visits and the number of visitors continued to grow also in 2024. During the last year, the most visited museums were the Seaplane Harbour, the Kumu Art Museum and the Open Air Museum in the capital of Estonia, in Tallinn, and the Estonian National Museum in Tartu, the university town.

News

A new furniture museum opened in the Rehbinder House, which is an early classicist noble residence in the centre of Rakvere. The first permanent exhibition is about Estonian furniture history from the 1400s to the early 1900s.

The Estonian Museum Card, which was launched in 2023, was extremely popular in 2024, gaining more than 143,367 visits per year (in 2023 the number was 55,957). The pass allows free unlimited visits to 132 museums in Estonia for a full year.

In 2024 Tartu, the second city in Estonia, was a European Capital of Culture. The programme included also many exhibitions and events in the museums of Tartu, for example 'Europe plays' in the Tartu Toy Museum, Ryoji Ikeda personal exhibition in

the Estonian National Museum, and 'Invisible city. 800 years of the city of Tartu' in the University of Tartu Museum.

The most important recognition of the Estonian museum scene are the annual museum awards, the purpose of which is to draw attention to the valuable work that our museums do for both their community and visitors. This year, the competition received 115 applications in 10 categories. This year's nominees highlight important topics, such as improving accessibility and dealing with mental health, which show the museums' efforts to involve all visitors. The implementation of innovative language immersion programmes that support the understanding and learning of the Estonian language and culture is also worth highlighting.

The important events on the museum field were also the Museum Night and the Curiosity Day. Taking place in May, the Museum Night was entitled 'There are things at night!' with the participation of nearly 200 memory institutions and 71,000 visitors. The Curiosity Day was initiated by the president of Estonia, and it took place in November. More than 25 museums all over Estonia opened their doors to the warehouses and introduced the exciting museum exhibits found in their collections.

Triin Vaaro

FRANCE

There were three main points to note about French museums in 2024.

The first concerns attendance. During the summer period, which also coincided with the Paris Olympic Games, Paris museums recorded a drop in attendance. Visitor numbers fell by 25% to 50% in the Ile-de-France region in July and August (14% at the Louvre, -28% at the Centre Pompidou, -26% at the Musée d'Orsay). However, these figures need to be qualified: on the one hand, this is a cyclical drop in visitor numbers after an exceptional year in 2023, and on the other, a new public has replaced the usual one. According to surveys, a much younger public than the usual cultural tourists visited the Musée Carnavalet, the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, the Petit Palais, the Palais Galliera and the archaeological crypt on the Ile de la Cité.

In autumn, with major exhibitions such as 'Caillebotte. Peindre les hommes' (Caillebotte: Painting Men) at the Musée d'Orsay, these establishments regained their popularity.

The second point concerns the missions and place of museums in society. As French museum professionals asserted in a December 17, 2023 article in the French daily *Le Monde* ("Museums must play their full part in the ecological debate"), museums are being forced to reinvent the way they act, think and operate, notably by reducing their carbon footprint. As a result, more and more eco-design training courses are being offered to museum professionals, notably by the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP). More and more eco-designed exhibits are being offered, and storage facilities with high thermal inertia or with spaces differentiated according to the types of objects conserved are opening their doors.

In addition, the actions initiated several years ago concerning provenance research and restitutions have continued, notably with the launch of a research fund on the provenance of objects from sub-Saharan Africa by France and Germany. The scheme, managed by the Marc-Bloch Franco-German Social Science Research Center, was launched in January 2024.

The third point concerns working conditions in museums. At the end of 2024, articles in dailies such as 'Libération' and 'Le Monde' highlighted the difficulties encountered by museums due to the increasing use of subcontractors, particularly for services linked to security, the loan of Audioguides, reception and mediation. The working conditions of the people hired from these external service providers were highlighted, as were the tensions generated within the teams by this type of operation.

The year 2024 was also marked by a number of major exhibitions in regional establishments, such as 'Cathares. Toulouse dans la croisade' at the Musée Saint-Raymond and the Couvent des Jacobins in Toulouse, the 'Miro, un braiser de signes' exhibition at the Musée de Grenoble, the 'Whistler, l'effet papillon' exhibition at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen, or the 'Couleur, gloire et beauté : peintures germaniques dans les collections françaises' exhibition organized jointly by the Musée Unterlinden in Colmar, the Musée des Beaux Arts et d'Archéologie in Besançon and the Musée des Beaux Arts in Dijon.

At the Musée d'Orsay, the 'Painter's Day' event on September 19 enabled 80 contemporary painters from the French scene to meet visitors for a day and an evening. The beginning of 2025 will be marked by the announcement by the President of the Republic of major renovation work at the Louvre Museum, and by the opening of the last temporary exhibition (the 'Suzanne Valadon' retrospective) at the Centre Pompidou before the museum closes for repairs for a period of five years.

Samuel Cordier

GEORGIA

Political and Cultural Challenges in 2024

In 2024, Georgia's museums and cultural sector faced severe challenges due to escalating political instability. The adoption of the so-called 'Russian Law' in the spring triggered widespread protests, disrupting civil society and cultural institutions. This law, requiring organizations receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as 'foreign agents', threatened the independence of museums reliant on international collaborations and grants. Cultural professionals expressed concerns over censorship, funding restrictions, and political interference.

The situation worsened in October amid allegations of election fraud. In November, the government unilaterally halted Georgia's EU accession path until 2028, despite strong public support for European integration. Large-scale protests erupted nationwide, while government crackdowns further strained the cultural sector. Museums, which had long benefited from European partnerships, now faced uncertainty, with restrictions jeopardizing access to training, networking, and funding. Institutions advocating democratic values through exhibitions and research found themselves under increased scrutiny. Despite these challenges, museums continued organizing cultural events and exhibitions, demonstrating resilience. International organizations closely monitored the situation, voicing support for the independence of museums and cultural professionals.

Key Activities in 2024

Training and Webinars

ICOM Georgia and the Victoria and Albert Museum London organized a capacity-building training for Georgian museum and heritage professionals on emergency planning in July. The programme covered risk management, emergency preparedness, and cultural heritage protection. A public seminar followed the programme, providing insights into crisis response strategies for cultural institutions. This project was supported by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Victoria and Albert Museum. ICOM Georgia and CIDOC launched CIDOC Fridays, a monthly webinar series dedicated to image documentation, exploring standards, digital challenges, and data management. Six webinars were held throughout the year, featuring experts discussing best practices. Additionally, CIDOC, ICOM-CC, and ICOM Georgia collaborated on the 'Documenting is Conserving' webinar series, which focused on collection documentation practices within conservation contexts.

Conferences and Training

From November 25-29, ICOM Georgia co-organized the ICOM Europe International Conference and Training Series on heritage resilience. The event featured disaster risk

management training and a conference addressing the challenges of safeguarding cultural heritage in crisis zones. The programme was supported by ICOM International SAREC Grants and engaged multiple international and national committees and organizations, including ICOM DRMC, ICOM MPR, ICOM France, ICOM Austria, ICOM Belgium, ICOM Italy, Blue Shield France, and Blue Shield Georgia.

From December 4-7, the ICOM MPR 2024 Training and Conference took place in Tbilisi. Co-organized by ICOM Georgia, ICOM MPR, Tbilisi Museums Union, and the Georgian Fine Art Museum, the project examined museum communication strategies during crises, emphasizing the role of museums in fostering community engagement and resilience.

Tbilisi Museums Union Initiatives

Despite the difficult political climate, the Tbilisi Museums Union remained committed to public engagement. In January, it launched a mobile application to provide easier access to museum information and events. In June, it organized the 'Journey Through Georgian Museums' summer school, offering students interactive learning experiences. Additionally, in December, the Ilia Chavchavadze Literary-Memorial Museum published 'Ilia's Thursday', contributing to research on Chavchavadze's literary and cultural legacy.

Conclusion

The political and social turmoil of 2024 profoundly impacted Georgia's museum and cultural sector. The suspension of EU integration increased governmental control, and growing repression created an uncertain and restrictive environment for cultural institutions. International collaborations, funding opportunities, and the ability of museums to operate freely have been severely challenged. The worsening situation, marked by mass repression, arbitrary arrests, and extreme laws, has affected all sectors, including culture. This has led to the suspension of most EU and US-funded programmes in Georgia. However, mass protests persist, with the Georgian people demonstrating unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights. The crisis has had a profound effect on all aspects of society, with the cultural sector particularly vulnerable.

Despite these hardships, Georgian museums, through international partnerships, professional development, and community-driven initiatives, continue to safeguard and promote cultural heritage. Support from the global museum community remains crucial in sustaining these efforts, reinforcing museums as essential institutions for historical truth, cultural identity, and public engagement in times of crisis.

Lana Karaia and Nana Meparishvili

GERMANY

Ongoing crises, increasing politicisation and the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence were important topics that moved museums in Germany in 2024.

The indirect effects of the multiple political, economic and social crises have not left museums in Germany unscathed. The many publicly funded museums have been affected by the significant cuts in public cultural budgets and are restricting their exhibitions and events. The economic recession is also making itself felt in a decline in private funding.

In contrast, people's trust in the museum as an institution remains particularly high, as several scientific studies have shown. Museums enjoy the highest level of trust in the personal and institutional environment after family and friends and before science and the media. They achieve the highest trust ratings of all public institutions. Trust in publicly owned museums, which people perceive as neutral and impartial, is particularly high.

In view of the increasing polarisation of political discussions and rising political populism, this situation presents both challenges and opportunities. Indeed, there are growing attempts to exert political influence, for example on the programming of museums, but also attempts to politically instrumentalise museums as bearers of the culture of remembrance. On the other hand, the perception of museums as trustworthy institutions offers the opportunity for museums to take an active role of a forum and mediator in social discussions.

The relationship between museums and politics are the subject of many discussions: How political should museums be? To what extent are museums required to take a stance in social and political debates? When and how can museums show a stance in the face of political populism, nationalism and hostility to democracy? How can museums of different disciplines play an active role as democratic actors in a diverse society? The German Museums Association is continuing the debate at its 2025 annual conference entitled 'Museums strengthen democracy'.

The breakthrough of artificial intelligence opens up new opportunities and challenges for museums, which are discussed based on the results of current research projects as well as practical examples from museums. The possibilities range from image and object recognition, translations, text analyses, content analyses and text creation to creative applications, image and media generation and support for artistic expression. Museums such as the Deutsches Museum Bonn, the Deutsches Museum

Nürnberg and the Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe ZKM are also devoting exhibitions to artificial intelligence and testing its practical application.

Museums and museum organisations are also increasingly grappling with the ethical issues surrounding the use of artificial intelligence and have issued ethical guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence in museum work.

Marion Grether and Dietmar Osses

GREECE

In Greece, 2024 was a year studied with bold new exhibitions in the country's museums and cultural institutions, some of which flow over into 2025. Salient exhibitions include those hosted at:

The Benaki Museum inaugurated an Anniversary Exhibition Celebrating 50 Years of Public Service and Creativity of the Basil Papantoniou Foundation and its founder's research, publishing, displaying and preserving culturally significant objects. The **WEFT AND WARP** exhibition picked up the threads of the history of costume to connect the past and tradition with the present and tomorrow's innovations and challenges. The BPF's extraordinary collection of artefacts and exceptional archive serve as the exhibition's lodestar. Since its foundation by Ioanna Papantoniou in 1974, the BPF has planned and implemented diverse activities. Like the weavers who warp the weaving loom in preparation for working on the textiles, the Foundation weaves the rich and multifaceted history of modern Greek clothing and material culture. The exhibition highlights essential parts of this activity through a historical review of the work of the Basil Papantoniou Foundation and its founder and a journey through different aspects of the garment.

The temporary exhibition at the Benaki Museum, **Poor Things: The costumes** celebrated the exceptional costumes of a recent, multi-award-winning international film. The exhibition was also shown at the Barbican Centre in London (2023). This exhibition gave the Benaki Museum's public the opportunity to discover 12 of the original handmade costumes created by Academy Award and BAFTA winner costume designer Holly Waddington for Yorgos Lanthimos's film *Poor Things* and worn by Emma Stone (Bella Baxter), Willem Dafoe (Godwin Baxter), Mark Ruffalo (Duncan Wedderburn), Ramy Youssef (Max McCandles), Vicki Pepperdine (Mrs Prim), Kathryn Hunter (Swiney) and Jerrod Carmichael (Harry Astley).

The Benaki Museum also inaugurated the exhibition **Art in gold. Jewellery in Hellenistic times**. The temporary exhibition is part of the Action 'The Collections of the Benaki Museum and Contemporary Design' of the Programme 'Attiki', Partnership Agreement 2021-2027, and is co-funded by the European Union. ART IN GOLD. Jewellery in Hellenistic Times. During the Hellenistic period, that followed the conquests of Alexander the Great, the art of jewellery-making attained its zenith. With the participation of 30 museums and Ephorates of Antiquities in Greece and five international museums, it presents unique assemblages of gold jewellery of the Hellenistic period (323–30 BC). Among them is a large part of the elaborate pieces of

jewellery from the 'Thessaly / Karpenisi Hoard', which is shared between the National Archaeological Museum in Athens and the Benaki Museum. Second-century BC goldsmith's tools found in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be exhibited for the first time in Greece, while informative texts and graphics, as well as videos and animations relating to the basic techniques of jewellery-making will accompany the exhibition. A video showing contemporary jewellery maker and researcher of ancient techniques, Akis Goumas, reconstructing parts of a precious diadem in the Benaki Museum – the result of several years of research and experimentation – will be screened in a dedicated room. Contemporary creations by Peter Bauhuis, Akis Goumas, Patrick Davison, Pura Ferreiro, Anastasia Kandaraki, Lucia Massei, Dimitris Nikolaidis, and Despina Pantazopoulou, inspired by items of jewellery at the Benaki Museum, will be exhibited alongside the antiquities.

The **Maria Callas Museum** is dedicated to one of the most important lyric singers of all time, whose performances changed the course of opera forever. The Maria Callas Museum invites visitors to immerse themselves in her world and her unique interpretation of some of the most iconic roles of her career. Through texts, objects, videos and rare sound clips that 'build' an overall experience for the visitor, the thread of the life and career of Maria Callas unfolds. The Maria Callas Museum is a remarkable tribute to the extraordinary life and achievements of the renowned opera singer. It belongs to the category of historical/biographical and performing arts museums, and its mission is to share the brilliance of the legendary opera singer's work with audiences in Greece and beyond. The museum and its permanent exhibition aim to achieve several objectives, including: Showcasing the unique art and technique of Maria Callas, exploring her true personality and dispelling any myths or misconceptions about her, explaining what made her unique, inspiring younger generations, collecting, preserving, maintaining and interpreting tangible and intangible items related to Maria Callas, serving as a hub for the musical education of different age groups by implementing a museum-educational strategy, creating a welcoming environment for everyone, including members of the public and the research community, with no bias or prejudice, and encouraging partnerships, contributions, and loans from institutions and private individuals.

Lastly, the **Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation** inaugurated a comprehensive tribute to the Neo-Impressionism art movement for the first time in Greece focusing on the Mediterranean region. The exhibition 'Neo-Impressionism in the Colours of the Mediterranean (1891-1914)' takes place in collaboration with important European museums and organisations including the Musée d'Orsay, the National Gallery in London, Centre Pompidou, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Besançon, the Musée de l'Annonciade, the Musée de Grenoble, the Musée national d'archéologie, d'histoire et

d'art – Luxembourg and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs as well as European private collectors. The exhibition included works by Paul Signac, Henri-Edmond Cross, Maximilien Luce, Théo van Rysselberghe, Henri Matisse, Henri Manguin and Louis Valtat, most of which presented for the first time in Greece. Marina Ferretti Bocquillon, Scientific Director Emerita at the Giverny Museum of Impressionisms (musée des impressionnismes Giverny) and Marie Koutsomallis-Moreau, Head of Collections at the Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation, were the exhibition's curators.

Nadia Macha

HUNGARY

Hungarian National Museum Public Collection Center

A radical change occurred in the institutional network in 2024, as the Hungarian National Museum Public Collection Center (MNM KK) was established by merging six cultural institutions on July 1. The Hungarian National Museum, National Széchényi Library, Museum of Applied Arts, Petőfi Literary Museum, the Hungarian Natural History Museum, and the Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism lost their independence and will continue their activities within a common institution. The joint work began just a few months after the proposal was formulated. The creation of the public collection centres was first mentioned by the Minister of Culture at the end of February, followed shortly after by a government decision. The creation of a holding of museums is justified by the need to modernize the institutional system in order to ensure the effective and non-overlapping spread and promotion of high culture.

Green Museum Criteria in Hungary

Museums also have a significant role to play in addressing climate change and preserving biodiversity. Accordingly, the definition of a museum adopted by ICOM in 2022 sets out the promotion of sustainability as an expectation, and the European Association of Museums (NEMO) specifically highlights the role of museums in environmental sustainability in its statement issued at the 2023 conference entitled Action! Museums in the Climate Crisis. In addition to numerous initiatives, the 'Green Museum' qualification has been introduced in several countries to recognize sustainable museum operations.

In Hungary, both the Hungarian Open Air Museum – Museum Education and Methodology Centre and the Pulszky Society – Hungarian Museum Association consider the integration of environmental sustainability into museum operations to be a particularly important topic. Several initiatives have been launched on the subject in recent years, and in 2024 the two organizations jointly launched a national quantitative research to establish the qualification of green museum operations. The aim of the survey is to map the practices, ambitions and opportunities of Hungarian museums related to environmental sustainability. Based on the above background, the 30-hour blended and accredited training course entitled 'Green Museum - Sustainability in Public Collections' was launched for the first time in 2024.

Dangerous legislation on the alienation of museum objects

On November 29, 2024, a section of the law adopted by Hungarian Parliament stipulates that the government may donate any state-owned movables as a protocol

gift free of charge. It is a cause for concern that, based on the provision, heritage items kept in our museums will become freely alienable for protocol purposes, lose their public property status, and be removed from the country. ICOM Hungary has started discussions with the competent ministry on the problem and its dangers.

New permanent exhibition in the new building of the Museum of Ethnography

The new permanent exhibition of the Museum of Ethnography (Collection Exhibition) covering more than 3,000 m² features almost 3,600 artefacts in eight thematic units. The Museum of Ethnography is one of Europe's prominent thematic museums, and its new building inaugurated in 2022 makes it one of the most modern ethnographic institutions in the world. Divided into eight themes, the exhibition offers different historical perspectives; rather than telling a single story, visitors can explore Hungarian traditions and the cultures of other peoples through various topics. The exhibition also focuses on the life of the artefacts in the collection, the fieldwork carried out by the experts, the history of the museum, and the treasures of folk art and their impact. At the same time, visitors will also learn about the relationship between art and ethnography, prehistoric research, and the concept of heritage.

Zsolt Sári

ICELAND

In Iceland, a country of 384,000 people, there are close to 200 museums, exhibitions, and cultural and historical centres. But only 47 museums are accredited by the Icelandic Ministry of Culture, Innovation and Higher Education 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 2024. 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.

As stated in last year's report, many Icelandic museums struggle with their owners and lack of support and understanding for their importance. 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 merger of different institutions to name a few examples. As a result of this ongoing challenge, the Icelandic Museum Association (IMA) launched a new project aimed at raising awareness of the important work museums do. Four workshops were held around the country, where museum professionals discussed the importance of museums and their work for the society, museums strengths, opportunities, and threats we're discussed as well as which actions can be taken to raise awareness of museums importance to different groups, such as members of parliament, local politicians, the public and the tourism sector. The result of the project was presented at IMA's annual conference, and an interest group was established – aiming to work towards the goal of a better working environment for museums.

Conferences and workshops were held throughout the year – focusing on preservation, exhibitions, visitor experiences etc. This time around The Icelandic Museums Association (FISOS) held their annual conference in Akureyri, North Iceland with 150 participants from museums all around the country participating in lectures, workshops, museum visits and learning opportunities during the three-day conference.

Icelandic Museums took part in the International Museum Day on 18 May with a variety of events and happenings. As a part of celebrating the IMD the Icelandic Museum Council, ICOM Iceland and IMA organized a symposium under the day's theme; *Museums for Education and Research*.

The Icelandic Museum Award is handed out every other year and in 2024 there were five nominations for the Award – which was handed out to the Reykjavík Art Museum for their progressive outreach work.

As before, the staff of Icelandic museums take on a wide range of projects regarding accessioning, exhibitions, research, preservation and visitor experiences. Despite different challenges, heavy workloads 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

2024 was a fairly positive year overall for the Irish museum sector. Politically, following recent elections in Ireland, the centre continues to hold. Elsewhere the picture varied, elections in Europe and in the United States saw a different dynamic emerge, against a background of conflict in Ukraine and Gaza and, mounting death tolls. Stability seems some distance away.

Prevailing issues in the Irish museum sector included the cost of living, inflation, mounting energy costs, digitising collections, climate change and the real threat of flooding. Immigration is an ongoing challenge. Irish authorities are struggling to provide accommodation and services in a country trying to cope with expansion. By mid-2024, 149,200 people had immigrated, the highest figure in years (asylum seekers doubled by 94%), raising the population of Ireland by just under a million, the largest increase since 2008.

State support of the arts and cultural heritage sectors remained strong with increased funding for artists. In 2022, when Government launched a scheme to provide a 'Basic Income for the Arts', it grew to support 2,000 artists, writers, musicians and performers. The pilot scheme proved successful and will be reviewed in 2025. An ancillary exhibition scheme was set up to encourage greater access to and promotion of regional museums as tourism resources.

The capital programme to expand/redevelop the cultural institutions continued, at a slow pace. The National Museum's natural history building (1857) and Cork's Crawford Gallery (1885) closed ahead of refurbishment programmes. The Office of Public Works, a major cultural heritage provider, acquired funding for four historic sites: Clonmacnoise, Corlea Trackway, Emo Court and Roscrea Castle. Another state body, the Heritage Council, launched an Organisations Support Fund to build the capacity of heritage infrastructure in non-state bodies and to prioritise projects with environmentally sustainable practices to deliver on national policy and plans. The Heritage Council worked with local authorities, communities and Archive Networks in publishing: *Succession Planning: A Guide for Community Archives and Heritage Groups*. The Council's Museum Accreditation Programme (MSPI) expanded with 79 sites and 64 participating museums. Elsewhere, Monaghan Museum moved to a new site in Monaghan's Peace Campus. The Little Museum in Dublin received funding for its redevelopment and, in Clare, the County Council is investing €1m in its Craggaunowen Open-Air Museum. A number of museums closed: Dublin Writers Museum and the An Post Museum disposed of their collections, and the Defence

Forces Air Force Museum collection is on long-term loan to Shannon Aviation Museum.

In Northern Ireland, guidelines were published, 'Supporting Decolonisation in Northern Ireland: Lessons learnt through Global Voices, Local Choices'. The Peacemakers Museum opened in the Bogside in Derry- Londonderry.

The Irish Museum Association's busy programme included publication of a Compensation Study report - Overview of current compensation practices in museums across Ireland; and, among its events, its annual conference in Carlow Museum focused on the future for regional museums.

Marie Bourke

ITALY

The **number of visitors** has strengthened over 2024 for most Italian museums, consolidating a trend that began in 2023, stimulated in the art cities by the return of foreign tourists. According to the Federculture Report, the presence of tourists from abroad in Italian art cities has increased about 34.5% in 2023 compared to 2022.

The desire for culture of Italian people has also returned in terms of participation, the enjoyment of all cultural activities outside home increased on average by about one and a half times compared to 2022 but the disparities between the Centre-North Italy and the South remain. According to the Federculture Report, in 2023 the largest increases are recorded as well as visits to museums and exhibitions (+44%) and to archaeological sites and monuments (+43%), compared to 2022, but the levels of cultural engagement in the Southern Regions are approximately half of those of residents in the Centre-North. The MIC reports +23% of visitors in National Museums in 2023 in comparison to 2022, and +34% of income.

Cultural tourism is about half of Italian tourism, but while the main art cities - and their big museums - are almost surrendering to overtourism (in 2024 the city of Venice eventually introduced the additional Access Fee of 5 € to the enter the historical city for one day), some isolated small villages and the small museums still need help to survive or function. See Next Gen EU M1C3 Investment 2.1. about attraction of **Little Villages** (1.020 million euros €) and Investment 2.2 about conservation and valorisation of **Rural Heritage** (600 million €); see also Open call for **Small Museums**, Act of the Ministry of Culture n.264/2024, with allocation of 1.900.000 € for the year 2024, not assigned yet.

Yet the Strategic Plan for Major Cultural Heritage Projects 2024 by the Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC) is investing in big museums. That is about 39 million € in nine museums: Museo del Libro, Naples; Marconi Museum, Bologna; Gallerie Estensi, Modena; GNAMC, Rome; Museo Ebraico, Milan; Musei Reali, Turin; Museo del Cinema, Turin; Palazzo Pitti, and Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

In 2024 the results of the implementation of Italy's Recovery and Resilience Plan, financed by UE through **Next Generation EU**, could start to be seen. MIC is in charge of the implementation of three main investments that are widely **reshaping national, public and private museums in a more digital, inclusive and sustainable way** through RRF funded projects. M1C3 Investment 1.1 **Digital strategies** and platforms for cultural heritage (500 million €); M1C3 Investment 1.2: **Removing** physical and cognitive **barriers** in museums, libraries and archives to enable access and participation in culture (300 million €); Investment 1.3: **Improving energy efficiency**

in cinemas, theatres and museums (100 million € only for national museums). Even if the actual expenditure is still low due to bureaucratic and administrative difficulties, the work is progressing and in some museums the output is already there to be seen. No official data has been published by the MIC yet, but reading some self-declared data on <https://openpnrr.it/>, it is possible to follow the work progress: the actual expenditure declared by recipients is about 10-15% for digital and inclusive transition in museums. An evaluation can only be drawn at the end of 2025, when it will be possible to understand the real impact on the needed institutional and operational transformation of museums in Italy. On the occasion of its bicentenary, in late 2024 opened part of the renovation of **Museo Egizio** in Turin, led by the Director Christian Greco and the President Evelina Christillin, both reconfirmed late in December despite the political controversies: the new display for the Gallery of Kings and the Ellesiya Temple are fundamental steps of the ambitious renovation plan of the archaeological museum, designed by OMA Studio. In 2018 the current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who was in opposition at the time, had an argument with the Director Greco about his decision to allow Arabic language speaking people to enter the museum with reduced tickets.

Another piece of good news is finally the opening with the final design by Mario Cucinella of **Palazzo Citterio**, part of the 'Great Brera project' of Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, after 52 years from the conception. The building was purchased in 1972 for the purpose of exhibiting the important Jesi and Vitali collections, expanding the Gallery collection up to the 20th century. An interesting choice is the one made by the new Director of the **GAM in Turin**, Chiara Bertola, to give a new impulse to the Modern Art Gallery, hosted in a building which would need a renovation, to valorize the warehouse with new display 'Living Depot' instead of transferring the collections to another building.

The new Director of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Simone Verde, former Director of the Pilotta museum in Parma, has renovated some rooms in the Gallery reconstructing some of the original setups and reopened after eight years the long **Corridoio Vasariano**, over the Arno River, reconnecting the Uffizi Gallery with the Palazzo Pitti. **Archaeological museums reopened** after renovations in 2024: Forma Urbis in Rome (which presents a new display for fragments of the marble map of the ancient city), Museum of the Parco Archeologico in Ostia Antica near Rome, Museo Archeologico in Stabia (near Naples), Museo Nazionale Jatta in Ruvo di Puglia. Brand new archaeological museum opened in 2024: Museo archeologico in Capri Island (near Naples).

Gennaro Sangiuliano, Minister of Culture up to the beginning of September 2024, started the year approving the strict 'Vandalism against works of art and monuments

Law' (DDL n.6, 22/01/24) and managed to make the internal reform of the structure of the Ministry of Culture approved, just before resigning on the 6th of September after a love affair scandal. His resignation has followed the one by his undersecretary, the famous Art Historian Vittorio Sgarbi, amid stolen painting suspicions. DG for Museums, led by **Massimo Osanna**, is assigned to the Department for the Valorisation of Cultural Heritage (separated from Department for Conservation).

Alessandro Giuli, also a journalist and former President of MAXXI Museum, National Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome, soon replaced Sangiuliano as Minister of Culture and represented Italy at the G7 Ministerial Meeting on Culture, held in Naples and Pompei from 19 to 21 September 2024. The new Minister has carried on the reform inside the Ministry and, in his first audition in Parliament, talked about museums as places for welfare services, particularly for children.

Irene Innocente

LITHUANIA

The year was a particularly active one in terms of political life, with presidential elections held on May 12, 2024, European Parliament elections on June 9, 2024, and Seimas elections on June 13, 2024. The 19th Government of the Republic of Lithuania was formed by a coalition of centre-left political parties.

On June 18, 2024, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the long-awaited Law on Cultural Policy Framework.

The Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, S. Kairys, expressed his hope that "the new law will help the future cultural policy to more firmly guarantee human cultural rights, to ensure the equal provision of cultural services throughout Lithuania, and to strengthen the cooperation between the state and municipal institutions and bodies and cultural actors."

Celebrating its centenary in 2024 the *Lithuanian Song Festival "Kad giria žaliuotu"* ("So That the Grove Would Green") took place in Vilnius from June 29 to July 6, 2024. Museums also added to the event programme, inviting guests and participants to new exhibitions and educational activities. A significant project was implemented by the Lithuanian Cultural Institute – *Season of Lithuania in France* - from September 12 to December 12, 2024. Several Lithuanian museums were also part of the project and presented exhibitions in France <https://english.lithuanianculture.lt/>. In 2024 the impact of the war in Ukraine remains significant for the political, economic, social and cultural life of Lithuania.

With the participation of colleagues from Ukrainian museums, training sessions and conferences were held to discuss topics related to emergency management and the protection and evacuation of exhibits. The experience of Ukrainian colleagues informed the revision and adjustments of the museums' emergency management and exhibit protection and evacuation plans.

Lithuanian museums and museologists were still actively involved in the organisation of support for Ukraine or joined public initiatives.

In early September 2024, the Lithuanian National Museum of Art and its partners evacuated the collection of 100 works by the Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko to Lithuania. Vytautas Kasiulis Art Museum (<https://www.lndm.lt/vkdm/>) now exhibits 60 of the artist's works. Some of the paintings evacuated from the Zaporizhzhya Regional Art Museum under extreme conditions were in very poor condition and are currently being restored and conserved by the specialists of the Pranas Gudynas Conservation Centre.

The Lithuanian National Museum of Art and the Jonas Karolis Chodkevičius Charitable Foundation have initiated a fundraising campaign to raise money for the restoration of the works of the Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko.

On September 18, 2024, the exceptional international exhibition “*Kyivan Rus’. Origins*” was opened at the National Museum of Lithuania (<https://lnm.lt/muziejai/istoriju-namai/>). The exhibition presents the most valuable exhibits of Ukrainian museums, covering almost 300 years of the history of the creation and prosperity of Kyivan Rus’ and deconstructs the propaganda image of the ‘Slavic world’. The story of Kyivan Rus’ is told through 1000-year-old archaeological finds from Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Sweden, Norway and Lithuania. On August 28, 2024, Kaunas IX Fort Museum opened the exhibition “*Bachmut. Faces of Genocide 1942|2022*” and other exhibitions about the war in Ukraine. <https://www.9fortomuziejus.lt/>

2024 was also notable for the presentation of new exhibitions in refurbished museum buildings. The renovation of several museum buildings, which had taken many years, was completed. New projects to upgrade the infrastructure of several museums in the region were launched. An exceptional highlight of the year in the field of Lithuanian culture and museums was the opening of the new art museum Stasys MU S.E.UM in summer 2024 in Panevėžys (the fifth-largest city of Lithuania) <https://stasysmuseum.com/en/>.

The museum in northern Lithuania immediately received great attention and appreciation. Within six months, it had over 50,000 visitors. Stasys Museum has become a significant cultural asset for the local community, strengthening regional cultural, educational, social, and economic activities. Its innovative architecture also positions the museum as a rising cultural institution on both national and international stages.

On December 2, 2024, the Architecture of the Year Award, granted by the Lithuanian Architects’ Union, went to the IMPLMNT Architects team for their work on the Stasys Museum.

This project is a remarkable example of integrating multiple disciplines — architecture, design, landscaping, and public space—into a cohesive whole. Thanks to the close collaboration of architects, designers, engineers, and artists, the museum reflects the values of the New European Bauhaus initiative with its bold, elegant, and functional design.

Gita Sapranauškaite

LUXEMBOURG

The year 2024 marked significant developments for the museum sector in Luxembourg, characterized by new inaugurations, enhanced support, and legislative advancements.

The *Musée national de la Résistance et des Droits Humains* (National Museum of Resistance and Human Rights) in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg's second largest city, reopened its permanent exhibition after extensive renovations. The renewed museum now combines a traditional focus on the history of the Second World War, and particularly the Luxembourgish Resistance movement, with a newly introduced section on global human rights. This expanded scope highlights the museum's commitment to connecting local history with universal themes, making it a key institution for education and reflection.

Other additions to Luxembourg's cultural landscape, like the *Musée des énergies* in Beckerich, dedicated to exploring energy production and sustainability, underscore the sectors' ability to attract visitors to rural regions by offering interesting indoor activities and drive tourism and community engagement in less urbanized regions. Sustainability and funding remained pressing issues in 2024, with institutions required to balance the need for innovation with limited resources. To address this challenge, the Ministry of Culture continued its support of the museum sector through 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*). In 2024, three grants were awarded to the *Musée de la Bataille des Ardennes* in Wiltz, for the enhancement of its World War II exhibits, the *Musée rural et artisanal* in Peppange, for the optimization of visitor reception in this museum of traditional rural crafts, and to the *Musée de l'aviation luxembourgeoise* in Mondorf for its digital initiatives in showcasing Luxembourg's aviation history. These grants emphasize the Ministry's dedication to fostering regional museums and ensuring diverse cultural offerings across the country.

A highlight carried into 2024 was the celebration of the successful crowdfunding campaign organized by the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Art in 2023 to acquire the painting "*Le Champion*" by Joseph Kutter, one of the most famous Luxembourgish painters of the 20th century. To honour the donors who made the acquisition possible, the museum hosted a special "*Nuit des Mécènes*" event in 2024, stressing the significance of public support in enriching the national collection and fostering a shared sense of cultural pride.

Additionally, the national heritage law (*Loi du 25 février 2022 relative au patrimoine culturel*) was amended to introduce standardized criteria for classifying cultural property as national cultural heritage. This included the establishment of a list of cultural properties of heritage interest, reinforcing the government's commitment to protecting and promoting Luxembourg's cultural legacy.

Lastly, the sector witnessed increased visitor numbers, with several museums reporting record attendance figures during national and international events, such as the Luxembourg Museum Days in May. Digital innovations, including virtual tours and online collections, also continued to grow, enhancing accessibility and engagement.

These developments underscore the Luxembourgish Museum sector's vitality and its role in preserving cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary societal needs.

Julia Kohl

MALTA

Malta's museum ecology is generally divided into public, religious, and non-governmental/private sectors, with each sector representing about one-third of the overall museum landscape. The national museums and heritage sites are administered by Heritage Malta, which serves as the national institution for cultural heritage. The Catholic Church manages museums and sites associated with Catholic cultural heritage, which are primarily run on a voluntary basis, except for the Cathedral Museum in the Old City of Mdina. The private museum sector, consisting of foundations and non-governmental organisations, includes two major NGOs as well as several house museums and military historical sites from the British period. New museum projects emerging from the private sector are also increasing.

Heritage Malta, governed by the Cultural Heritage Act (2002) and its subsequent amendments, serves as the central reference point for cultural heritage in Malta. However, the ecosystem still lacks long-overdue policies and regulatory frameworks. Among these, tailored museum legislation and a museum accreditation scheme to oversee the operations of private and non-governmental museums are of utmost importance. Malta currently lacks a dedicated museum law and a national museum association. These deficiencies hinder the essential sustainable development of the sector. According to media sources, in 2024, Heritage Malta reported a record 1,650,000 visitors to museums and historical sites under its jurisdiction. These figures indicate that the total visitor count encompasses both paying and non-paying individuals, potentially including visiting schoolchildren. The number of paying visitors reported in August 2024 across all Heritage Malta sites was 816,983, with a significant proportion probably comprising tourists. Overall, the Maltese museum sector remains heavily reliant on tourism, with local participation primarily linked to regular open days hosted by the national network of museums and sporadic educational events organised by museums in general. No official data is available for private and non-governmental museums on the island.

Heritage Malta's main challenges over the past 12 months have included resource management and site/museum security. Reports of vandalism and theft rose in 2024. Political interference is another concern. The chairperson of the board of directors has assumed the role of museum director by direct decision of the board, resulting in technical and administrative issues within the agency. Moreover, the agency lacks the requisite know-how and expertise to operate a museum. This contravenes standard best practices and the ICOM code of ethics.

Several new museums and restored heritage sites are now accessible to the public. Most of these additions are state-funded, thanks to the EU Regional Development Funds made available over the past few years. Highlights include phase 1 of the restoration of the Grandmaster's Palace in Valletta, inaugurated in January 2024, and the Malta International Contemporary Art Space (MICAS), inaugurated in October 2024. The latter cost approximately 9 million euros, of which 3.9 million euros were allocated to the structure. Additionally, there have been significant expenses for events held at MICAS that have been questioned by the local press. Other additions include private museums and heritage sites, particularly those run by the Catholic Church. However, the lack of a museum accreditation scheme raises questions about whether these align with best practices and international standards and whether they can be recognised as proper museums. New projects still underway include the Gozo Regional Museum and the St John's Co-Cathedral Museum. The latter is set to open to the public in 2025 and is projected to cost 13 million euros, but it is highly likely to experience further delays.

The highlight of 2004 was the revamp of the Malta Biennale, which was first organised in the 1990s. This cultural event brought together contemporary art and historical themes across museums and heritage sites under the auspices of the national agency, Heritage Malta. The Malta Biennale featured works by 80 artists from 23 countries, showcasing diverse artistic visions with a thematic emphasis on the range of topics and themes. However, the event faced criticism for its poor organisational approach, lack of representation by local artists, insufficient research, unclear selection processes for key roles such as artistic directors and curators, and inadequate transparency regarding budget allocations. Internal friction within the institution was also apparent, primarily concerning the curatorial management of events and heritage sites and museums.

The primary challenges faced by the Maltese museum ecosystem are its independence from political influence and its long-term sustainability. There is a growing necessity for more effective and decisive implementation of the arms-length principle at both political and management levels, particularly within the national museum network and regarding funding available to private institutions. Addressing a missing legislative framework and the lack of a bespoke museum law would ensure the adoption of best practices, recognition of expertise, and a significantly more resilient sector.

Sandro Debono

MOLDOVA

In the year 2024, there were no special events or technical revolutions in Moldovan museography.

What is new – the Law on Museums has been amended. Thus, starting from January 1, 2025, museums have the right, with the consent of the Ministry of Culture, to establish independently the payment for the services offered by the museum, including the payment of the entrance ticket. In the law, the notion of museum was also modified, according to the last one, approved by ICOM at the Prague Conference. The definition of the virtual museum was also introduced.

Elena Plosnita

MONTENEGRO

Montenegro, a geographically small country but with an exceptionally rich historical and cultural heritage, has 18 local and state museums, most of which are housed in buildings that are themselves cultural monuments. Consequently, the majority of museums in Montenegro face the same challenge regarding the maintenance of these buildings and, by extension, their exhibitions.

Montenegro has laws, regulations, institutions, and non-governmental organizations dedicated to museum activities, yet there is still no adequate infrastructure for museums. Next year, in 2026, Montenegro will mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of its first state museum—the National Museum of Montenegro. However, the country still does not have a single purpose-built facility for museum activities. Only the youngest museum—the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montenegro—will soon receive its first purpose-designed and constructed buildings for its operations.

Although there are established legal norms, there remains a practical impossibility of adequately implementing and adhering to them. According to the Law on Museum Activities and the 2011 Rulebook on the Specific Conditions for Performing Conservation Activities, spaces allocated for conservation of movable cultural assets or museum materials must range between 30 and 60 square metres. Additionally, the current legal framework stipulates that museum storage facilities cannot be in basements, ground floors, or attics. Unfortunately, due to these challenges, no museum in Montenegro meets these requirements.

Some museums, mainly local ones, operate as part of other cultural institutions, even though laws governing museum and library activities, dating back to 2010/11, require these public institutions to function as independent cultural entities.

There is also a noticeable lack of specialized and technical staff needed for the proper operation of museums. The shortage of specific professional profiles, as well as the absence of scientific-academic departments at Montenegrin universities that educate and train such personnel (e.g., archaeologists, ethnologists, etc.), has resulted in significant gaps in performing essential museum processes.

Despite these challenges, all museums strive to bring their collections closer to the public and interested audiences through temporary and permanent exhibitions and various educational programmes, thereby maintaining their primary societal function. The National Museum of Montenegro, as the parent institution for most of these activities, seeks to set a good example for other museums and the museum community in Montenegro by introducing new technological tools, educational workshops,

exhibitions of domestic and foreign artists, and an innovative methodology for managing museum documentation.

Montenegro's museum community faces significant challenges, but by recognizing these issues and uniting all stakeholders and their practices, there is hope for overcoming them in the near future.

Isidora Kovačević

THE NETHERLANDS

Facts & figures on 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 last year was comparable to 2023: The Dutch Museum Association expects around 29-32 million visitors. 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 exploitation.

This highly appreciated growth in visitor numbers cannot hide the fact that almost all museums struggle with their exploitation. High inflation and the disproportionate increase in the costs of energy, personnel, IT, insurances are a heavy burden for the future. More visitor income does not solve the deficit. Funding has only increased a very limited amount with the cost increases. This is especially true for local and regional museums, but there were some very well-known Dutch national-regional museums (Fundatie, Cobramuseum) needing 'rescue operations'.

Unfriendly political atmosphere

As the elections gave a significant, substantial victory for culture-unfriendly political parties, there are serious worries. For one there were plans to raise the VAT for culture in general (museums, books, concerts) from 9% to 21%. This has been halted by the parliament, but it is seen as a sign of the times. A purely economic approach to culture - spend less money on it and make more money – frightens the sector. This is not in the least as there is no vision or thought about the meaning and (economic) value of culture.

Some developments -

The opening of the National Holocaust Museum – March 2024 – received a lot of attention nationally. The opening was broadcast live but was also disrupted by activists who protested at the presence of an Israeli delegation.

In more cases museums were victim to political actions, mostly due to receiving funds from criticized sponsors. The Rijksmuseum – just one example - was briefly blocked by Extinction Rebellion.

There are still new private (art) museums to be opened. A new art museum in Zaandam is planned for 2025, potentially one of the largest museums of the world.

There is good news too: more than 70% of Dutch people regard museums as indispensable and 85% believe that museums are from and for all of us. In addition, 70% think it is good that the government structurally contributes to museums.

Dirk Houtgraaf

NORTH MACEDONIA, REPUBLIC OF

Within the Ministry of Culture, for the first time, tourism has been incorporated as an integral part of it. The goal is the development of a combination of culture and tourism, more precisely, cultural heritage to create a basis for cultural development tourism. The new name is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Within the frame of the Ministry a Working Group was formed for the preparation of a new Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage. The goal is the rationalization of administrative procedures between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the national and local institutions for the protection of cultural heritage. Also, a Working Group was formed for the development of a National Strategy for the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage.

The national strategy will be the first planning document that will provide plans for the future for the next five years in this area. Programmed museum activities for 2024 in the Republic of North Macedonia were realized as usual through the annual open call of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 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. What is worth mentioning as an event in the field of archaeology is the epoch-making discovery of the archaeological site near the village of Koroishte, in the vicinity of the city of Struga. The head of the research is the archaeologist Dr Pero Ardzanliev from the Archaeological Museum of the R.N. Macedonia – Skopje. The discovery refers to a rich Archaic grave from the 6th century BC where a bronze helmet was discovered in the tomb; gold rings, amber and glass beads; gold foils of various shapes and decoration; silver needles; bronze wine vessel; silver kantharos; bronze plates and other artefacts, that will later be conserved and presented to the public Through the museum projects in 2024, 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.

The international activity of the museums in 2024 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 new projects for cross-border cooperation using EU funds, especially highlighting the cooperation with the R. Greece.

Gordan Nikolov

NORWAY

There are approximately 100 museums in Norway that receive their primary funding from the public sector, mainly from the Ministry of Culture, in addition to various museums financed by other ministries or the Sámi Parliament. In 2024, around 11 million visitors explored museums and exhibitions across the country. This marked the first full year since the opening of the new National Museum in Oslo, a development that contributed to increased visitor numbers and heightened national attention on museums in Norway.

Smaller museums located in more remote areas have also successfully increased their activity and attracted more visitors through the diligent efforts of their staff. For instance, the North Troms Museum, situated far north in Norway and staffed by just eight employees, has enjoyed a remarkable 32% increase in attendance. The museum focuses on Sámi, Kven, as well as Norwegian history and culture, showcasing a comprehensive representation of the cultural diversity of North Troms. Over the past few decades, individuals from various parts of the world have settled in the region, prompting the museum to engage with new demographics both thematically and as visitors. This exemplifies how museums can remain relevant to broader audiences by being inclusive and representative in their communications.

The report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, released in 2023, has led to intensified efforts toward preserving the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples and national minorities in 2024. A range of new initiatives and increased public funding have been earmarked for the preservation and dissemination of these groups' cultural legacies.

Despite the encouraging visitor statistics, museums continue to grapple with financial challenges. Public subsidies have not kept pace with overall price inflation. While privately funded art museums, based on private collections, have been established (such as Kunstsilo in Kristiansand and PoMo in Trondheim), many publicly funded art and cultural history museums are struggling with issues related to the preservation of collections, maintenance of buildings, and opportunities for professional development, as well as programming for exhibitions and outreach. The backlog in collection preservation and maintenance of historical buildings is growing, exacerbated by underfunding as well as the accelerating impact of climate change on cultural heritage sites.

The signals from the authorities are clear: museums must increase their own contributions in order to maintain or increase their budgets. At the same time, there is an unspoken expectation from both public and private sectors that museums should not charge high admission fees, with a preference for free entry, especially for economically vulnerable groups.

Inclusivity, social dialogue, democracy, relevance, and representativity remain prevalent buzzwords in the discourse surrounding museums in Norway. However, 2024 has revealed international trends suggesting the potential for a backlash from reactionary forces, both politically and economically. Consequently, museums must prepare for shifts in values, even in peaceful Norway.

A recently published survey conducted in 2024 on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate of Culture reveals that a significant majority—over 60%—of the Norwegian population believes it is essential for the government to support the arts and culture sector. Furthermore, the same study highlights a considerable opportunity for museums to enhance their visitor numbers and, consequently, their revenues. Notably, more than 40% of participants reported that they had neither visited a museum in the past 12 months nor ever set foot in one.

We have work to do.

Hanna Mellemsether

POLAND

In 2024 the biggest influence on museums (as for overall cultural, social and economic life) had both general elections from 2023 and local government elections from 2024. As a result, there were political changes not only in the government and Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, but also on the local government's level.

This also had to have an impact on museums. According to the Museums Register¹ provided by Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in Poland in 2024 there were 1047 museums, acting on the basis of the Act for Museums. To list them according to their founders: 1) museums listed as cultural institutions: a) state museums (managed by ministries) – 28, b) local government museums (managed by local governments) – 334, c) co-founded museums – 31, 2) museums without the status of a cultural institution - managed by: a) church or religious bodies – 14, b) natural persons – 431 and c) business entities, foundations, associations, higher education institutions, etc – 209.

In 2024, after some years of pause in this procedure, in most of the state museums there were open competitions for directors. Some of these procedures are now completed and museums have new directors, or the same directors as previously but now selected in the competitions – for their new contracts. In other state museums the competitions for directors are still in progress. There are also competitions for directors in some museums founded by local governments. This very important process must have an impact on museums' activities. Many directors and their teams are working now on the new programmes – exhibition programmes, education, sometimes also new mission statements. There are also some new museums investments (eg.museum storage). Another important phenomenon is the marked development of contemporary art institutions and projects. The specific symbol for the two last mentioned trends is the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in a new building, at the end of 2024. In addition to these positive trends, unfortunately, it we must mention the necessary actions aimed at strengthening the security of museums in the event of war - the effect of the ongoing war in Russia caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Joanna Grzonkowska

¹ <https://bip.mkidn.gov.pl/pages/rejestry-ewidencje-archiwa-wykazy/wykaz-muzeow.php>
[access checked 21.01.2025]

PORTUGAL

2024 was yet another year of major changes for the Portuguese heritage sector, particularly for the museums under the Ministry of Culture, but also for the private sector, namely for foundations.

Museums under the Ministry of Culture

Aiming to modernize the sector, the previous government decided to alter the administrative status and replaced the General-Direction of Cultural Heritage that supervised all National Museums, National Palaces and National Monuments in Portugal by a state public entity, *Museus e Monumentos de Portugal, E.P. E.* [Museums and Monuments of Portugal, E.P. E.]. This entity started its functions on January 1st, 2024. Due to this change, a lot of bureaucratic procedures were changed, envisaging a future and gradual autonomy for these state museums. Still, the financing of the museums, palaces and monuments under MMP diminished significantly in 2024, which increased the difficulties these institutions already experienced.

To balance the financial situation, and aiming an increasing financial support to these establishments, ticket prices went up substantially (almost 100%).

To avoid a negative impact in the number of national and resident visitors, the new Minister of Culture (in office since March 2024) decided to create the Voucher 52 (thus granting 52 free entrances during the year to all Portuguese and foreign residents in Portugal, to access museums, palaces and monuments, in any day of the week of their choice). This measure has been quite popular, and it has been attracting new visitors to museums.

Even more, all museum, palaces and monuments directors under the Ministry of Culture had to run again for office and some of these positions are still undergoing these public tender processes.

Visitors' data in public entities

The information concerning the number of museum visitors has not been released yet. Nevertheless, all in all, museums under this public entity experienced an increased number of visitors, both national and international (general perception of museum directors I spoke to). Plus, in November 2024, the newspapers stressed an increase of foreign museum visitors, particularly in Porto.

Renewal of state museum buildings

Closed to the public since April 2022, the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia [National Archaeology Museum], installed in the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, has been the subject of a major transformation, of restoration of façades and of internal excavations

envisaging a significant expansion. The announced and most needed expansion of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga [National Museum of Ancient Art] is under study. The previously announced decision to enlarge the building of the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea [National Museum of Contemporary Art] that led to the preparation of an international call for architects, announced on the very last days of 2023, was the recipient of 29 architecture projects. However, the MMP announced that, for the moment, there are no financial conditions to proceed, postponing this expansion *sine die*.

Digital transformation

Heritage digital transformation is now undergoing in all MMP museums, palaces and monuments.

Serralves and the new Modern Art Centre (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)

Inaugurated at the end of 2023, void of any exhibitions and intending to allow the public a raw sense of the space, the new wing of Serralves Museum (Ala Álvaro Siza) opened in March 2024, with a new exhibition programme. This new wing stresses the importance of Serralves for Portugal, both architecturally and collection wise, and this significant expansion (more than 44% of exhibition area and 75% more for storage space) creates a whole new horizon for the museum future.

Following its architectural renewal, the Centro de Arte Moderna (CAM) [Modern Art Centre] reopened to the public, with a new concept. In spite of the great expectations it created in the sector, both public and art and museum critics have been very negative regarding the director's choices, mainly in which regards the (felt) lack of interest in the collections.

Patronage laws

The announced new rules to the private financing of museums (announced in 2023, and in preparation in the beginning of 2024) did not come through, as they were interrupted by the change of government.

Emília Ferreira

ROMANIA

Romanian museums have navigated a complex period with ups and downs, characteristic of the tense times our country has been through recently. The organization of four rounds of elections - local, European Parliament, parliamentary, and presidential, at different times of the year, has occupied the public agenda with other priorities, where the voice of culture has been less heard. Absolute novelties for Romania's young democracy, such as the cancellation of the presidential elections, have only further intensified the general state of anxiety, caused by the prolonged economic crisis post-Covid-19 and the painful continuation of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, a neighbouring country to Romania.

Legislative initiatives from 2023 that impacted the organization of the public system for protecting heritage continued to appear this year: as early as January 2024, we helplessly witnessed the dismantling of the check and balancing system within the Ministry of Culture by transforming the National Commission of Museums and Collections from a decisional body into a consultative one. In practice, the decision to organize or reorganize museums, including through mergers or closures, has shifted from a collegial body of specialists to the exclusive authority of a politician - the minister, appointed by another politician - the prime minister. The total politicization of Romania's public cultural system is the greatest failure of 2024.

From an infrastructure perspective, the past year marked the emergence of new museums or museum points that will strengthen the process of protecting and communicating Romanian cultural heritage. We mention here the opening of Olympia - Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism - within the Braşov County Museum of History (implemented through a project funded by EEA Grants 2014 – 2021 under the RO-CULTURE Program, under the call for "Support for Innovative Exhibitions with Restored Mobile Cultural Goods"), the Sibiu House of Arts - within the ASTRA National Museum Complex Sibiu - funded through EEA Grants 2014 – 2021 under the RO-CULTURE Programme, the "Nicolae Gane" Museum - within the National Museum of Romanian Literature in Iaşi, the MINA Museum in Cluj-Napoca, or the new Museum of Sciences in Braşov (private museums).

The human resources in Romanian museums are going through one of the most delicate periods in recent decades; the public sector salary policy has left museum employees in the sad situation of having among the lowest salaries in Romania. This leads to personnel haemorrhage and frustration, which affects the quality of professional work.

In terms of international collaborations, we mention here the hosting by the ASTRA National Museum Complex Sibiu of the annual conference of the Network of European Museums Organisations, on November 10-12, 2024, organized alongside the National Network of Museums in Romania, under the theme 'Can we talk? Museums facing polarisation'.

The beneficiaries of the cultural act of protecting and communicating mobile cultural heritage have stood by Romanian museums in 2024, but we have seen a slight decrease compared to 2023, which represented an absolute record, due to the disappearance of health restrictions from the years 2020-2022. We are confident that in the coming years, we will return to the initial upward trend.

Valer Rus

SERBIA

During 2024, continuity can be observed in relation to the development and improvement of the museum profession. Design solutions for the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Nikola Tesla were made, and the project of the History Museum in the building of the former railway station has started. The Gallery Matica srpska from Novi Sad opened a new permanent exhibition and with an innovative approach set significantly higher standards than the previous ones in designing permanent exhibitions.

In terms of the decentralization of culture, the continuation of investments to the museums throughout Serbia is noticeable. During the year 2024, the city of Uzice held the title of the capital of culture of Serbia and realized numerous cultural programmes within the annual program.

Cooperation with the region is particularly noticeable in the exchange of exhibitions and the joint implementation of projects both among museums of national importance and in border areas. Especially important for regional cooperation and its encouragement was a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Forum of Slavic Cultures, which greatly contributes to regional integration.

In addition to regional cooperation, constant following of good European practices and the exchange of experiences certainly contribute to the improvement of museum activity in Serbia.

Lidija Milasinović

SLOVAKIA

In 2024, Slovak museology faced significant challenges impacting its professional stability, governance transparency, and financial sustainability. Actions by the new government, particularly within the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic—led by a nominee from the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS)—have adversely affected cultural institutions, the independent cultural sector, and the professional community.

Legislative Changes and Governance

A notable legislative amendment now permits museum and gallery directors to be dismissed without stated reasons. This development diminishes transparency in personnel policies and facilitates potential political interference in cultural institutions. Consequently, leadership changes have occurred at the Slovak National Gallery, the Slovak National Museum, the Slovak Mining Museum, and several other museums, with appointments of individuals lacking relevant professional experience.

Financial Challenges

The financial landscape has deteriorated, with multi-source funding under threat due to uncertainties surrounding the future of the Arts Council and other national funding schemes. Budget reductions in national cultural institutions have led to personnel cuts and the closure of specific smaller museums. Notably, many museums have experienced a 10% reduction in staff, jeopardizing the continuity of professional activities and the preservation of collection items and heritage sites.

Professional Community Response

The Ministry of Culture has demonstrated a minimal willingness to engage in professional dialogue or incorporate public participation in developing cultural policy. Employees in many organizations operate under unclear and unstable conditions, facing various forms of intimidation.

In response to these adverse trends, the professional community strongly opposes current cultural policies. Platforms such as ‘Open Culture’ and the ‘Platform for Free Museology’ have been established, uniting museum employees to enhance networking and coordination within the sector. Additionally, several impacted state-established organizations and NGOs declared a state of emergency strike.

Impact on Regional and Municipal Institutions

Legislative and funding changes may have long-term negative consequences for state museums and regional and municipal institutions. Declining resources and

modifications to funding schemes restrict both the development of independent culture and as well as endanger the preservation of Slovakia's cultural heritage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Given these factors, it is imperative to urgently reassess current policies and restore constructive dialogue between state authorities and the professional community. A collaborative approach is essential to ensure the sustainability and integrity of Slovak museology.

Zuzana Palicová

SLOVENIA

Museums in Slovenia are categorized as either state or authorized museums based on their founding entities. State museums are established by the Republic of Slovenia, while authorized museums are founded by municipalities. The primary distinction between the two lies in their funding sources and the appointment of their directors. For state museums, the Minister of Culture is responsible for appointing directors, whereas for authorized museums, this responsibility rests with municipal authorities. Both types of museums are financed through public funds: state museums entirely by the Ministry of Culture, and authorized museums partially from the same source and partially from municipal budgets. Sponsorship and donation opportunities are limited, as current legislation does not incentivize businesses to engage in such activities. Nearly all Slovenian museums actively participate in projects funded by the European Union. Several museums in western Slovenia were also involved in preparations for this year's European Capital of Culture, Nova Gorica-Gorizia.

Museums are professionally independent institutions with numerous opportunities to collaborate with scientific, educational, artistic, and cultural organizations, including public institutions, private entities, and non-governmental organizations. In 2024, the number of museum visitors increased significantly—by almost 30%—continuing the upward trend that began after the Covid-19 pandemic. Several museums have excelled in their work. The Regional Museum Maribor presented an exhibition about a nearly forgotten portrait artist, while the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as a coordinator of intangible heritage, maintained and expanded the Slovenian Intangible Heritage Register. MUZA-NLB (formerly Bankarium) focused on financial literacy and raising awareness about the importance of identifying cybercrime and fraud through its permanent programs and occasional exhibitions. Meanwhile, the City Museum of Ljubljana played a crucial role in promoting equality and tolerance with an exhibition on the history of the LGBT+ community in the city, complemented by numerous projects and events highlighting the fight for this community's equal rights.

Challenges faced by museums over the past year are long-standing. A key issue is the shortage of professionals trained in modern museum vocations, which slows the transformation of certain museums, particularly smaller ones. Many museums are housed in historical buildings requiring continuous investments in renovation and energy efficiency. Museums authorized to manage materials from archaeological excavations face additional challenges in securing appropriate storage for the large volumes of materials they acquire.

Slovenian museums largely adhere to the principles of modern museology, contributing to trends in exhibitions, visitor experiences, and the preservation of museum materials. Continuous professional education and fostering collaboration within the relatively small museum community remain one of priorities for the

Slovenian museum sector. A significant emphasis is placed on collaboration and integrating museum projects within local communities.

Blaž Vurnik

SPAIN

2024 has been a year with a significant increase in attendance of visitors to Spanish museums, especially those with the highest audience numbers. This is due to Spain receiving the highest number of tourists in its history: 94 million, which is 10 million more than in 2019.

Some museums have broken attendance records, such as the Museo Nacional del Prado and some of the 16 state museums managed by the Spanish government. Here are some figures:

- The Museo del Prado achieved the highest visitor numbers in its history, exceeding 3,457,000 visitors.
- The Museo Reina Sofía received 1,537,105 visitors (compared to 1,409,113 in 2023), an annual increase of 9%.
- The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza welcomed 951,821 visitors, a slight decrease of 6% compared to 2023, when it received 1,012,660.
- The 16 State Museums, managed by the Ministry of Culture, received 3,121,418 visitors, the highest figure in their history.
- The Guggenheim Bilbao attracted 1,301,343 visitors; a 2% decrease compared to the previous year (1,324,221 visitors, its record).
- Barcelona's municipal museums received 4,754,500 visitors in 2024, a 6% increase compared to the previous year and close to the 4,824,376 visitors of 2019. As in previous years, the Museu Picasso topped the list with 1,130,500 visitors, followed by the Born Centre de Cultura i Memòria (973,000).
- The Museo Carmen Thyssen in Malaga saw over 202,000 visits, a record since its opening in 2011, and the Museo Picasso in Malaga received close to 800,000 visitors in 2024, surpassing the previous year's figure.

In all cases, and according to data from the museums themselves, the proportion of foreign visitors has increased, aligning with Spain's success as an international tourist destination. This has led to an increase in self-generated revenue, improving the financial health of Spanish museum institutions.

This trend is especially notable among the top 20 museums, where foreign tourists account for over 60% of visitors. At the Guggenheim Bilbao, for example, two-thirds of its visitors were from abroad.

However, most Spanish museums are local museums with varying attendance figures, depending on their location in tourist areas and their exhibition and activity

programmes. Museums managed by local governments continue to operate thanks to the dedication and commitment of their professionals, which, in most cases, are insufficient to manage the valuable heritage in their care.

Public Initiatives and Events

Public administrations have organized conferences and seminars focused on current topics, such as:

- Sustainability: ICOM Spain and ICOM Europe organized the International Seminar 'Museums, Tourism, and Innovation. Towards a Sustainable Future'.
- Accessibility: The 9th Conference of the Cultural Heritage Observatory of Catalonia was dedicated to 'Exhibition Texts Focused on Audiences. Evaluation in the Service of Content Transmission'.
- Participation: The 4th edition of the Canary Islands Museum Congress was held under the theme 'Museums, Participation, and Social Transformation', The Lugo Provincial Museum Network hosted sessions entitled 'Research and Learning in the Museum: Another Time. Strategies of Social Museology'.
- Intercultural Mediation: The 24th Museum and Education Conference of the Maritime Museum of Barcelona focused on 'Intercultural Perspectives'.
- Impact and Application of Artificial Intelligence in Museums: The 5th 'Confluences Space' promoted by the Local Museums Network of the Barcelona Provincial Council, was entitled 'Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities for Museums and Heritage'. Similarly, the 8th Cultural Heritage Conference organized by the Catalan Cultural Heritage Agency was dedicated to 'Artificial Intelligence Applied to Cultural Heritage'.
- Decolonization: Congress organized by MakingHistories, CONCILIARE, and UNED: 'Decolonizing Museums and Reinterpreting Monuments'. Seminar organized by the Museum of America, the National Museum of Anthropology, the Sub-directorate General of State Museums, ICOM Spain, ASAE, and the Complutense University of Madrid: 'Museums, Collections, and Memory: Intercultural Dialogues for Decolonization'. Meeting organized by the Generalitat of Catalonia: 'Inhabited Museum: Disrupting Conjurations'.

Technological Innovation in Exhibitions

Lastly, it is worth highlighting the increase in exhibitions using XR technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, holography, and 360° experiences.

In most cases, these are private initiatives targeting broad audiences. Close attention should be paid to the adoption of these technologies in museums, which continue to offer primarily analogue experiences.

Antoni Laporte

SWEDEN

In Sweden, there have been many discussions about museum buildings during 2024. Rents are going up and some museums can't afford the rent or can't afford the cost of necessary repairs and maintenance. The Museum of Natural history closed in the autumn of 2023 and remained closed until the summer of 2024, due to lack of maintenance work, causing risks to visitors and staff, after a part of the ceiling fell down. The Museum of Dance is forced to close in January 2025, due to high rent. They are moving to temporary premises during 2025 and are looking for a new permanent location with lower rental costs. Many local and regional museums also struggle with the increasing costs, both for rents and energy costs. So, there is an ongoing discussion about rents and other costs, arguing that museums have to spend all their funding on their buildings, rather than creating cultural experiences.

Another topic on the agenda is discussions about creating a national museum card, for people to buy to access all museums. There are some thoughts about how this could be done, looking at other countries for examples, but many things are unclear concerning costs and benefits. Many museums have no entrance fees, others need to get income from the fees and risk losing some of it. The discussion is likely to continue in 2025.

A government report was published in the beginning of the year, concerning the funding of culture. The report contained several suggestions concerning governmental funding of museums, which currently is channelled through the regional level. It is not clear what will become of the suggestions, but the proposition was criticised by many museums, and there was lack of clarity in some areas. One suggestion was, for example, that larger municipalities should be able to take part of governmental funding without the involvement of the regional level, which would change the dynamics between different levels of government, as well as between larger and smaller museums. There are changes to come in the funding system, but it is still unclear how things will change. But it was quite clear that there will not be additional funding in a new system, only another way of distributing existing funds. There are also suggestions of including new fields to be able to take part of the funding for culture, such as creation of computer games or circus, which would mean less funding to fields included in the national cultural budget today.

There has also been a debate about creating a cultural canon, which should be taught to everyone. The purpose, says the government, is to create a common frame of reference, since culture is a connecting force in society, and they want to make culture accessible to more people. A team has been appointed to create this canon, and their

report is due in august 2025. Concerns have been raised about inclusion and the multifaceted culture when a canon is created. A canon could exclude people and become a nationalistic tool or simply be ignored because the cultural sector itself doesn't find it relevant. There has already been a debate about inclusion of national minorities, such as the Sami people, who feel they are not being properly consulted.

Many museums are also doing marvellous things and get a lot of attention. For example, The Maritime Museum and Aquarium in Gothenburg became the Swedish museum of the year, after rebuilding their exhibitions during a couple of years. Nordiska museet in Stockholm opened a large new permanent exhibition, Nordic Life, which has been much appreciated, and has attracted a large number of visitors.

Anna Hansen

SWITZERLAND

Provenance research

Provenance research is an established topic for bigger institutions, especially art museums and ethnographic collections. As an example, the ongoing provenance research of the Ethnographic Museum in Basel (Museum der Kulturen) allowed the restitution of a dhulu, an ancient carved tree, to the Gamilaraay in Australia, and to create a new and respectful partnership with this community, which created a new dhulu as a gift to Basel. Also, the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft at the Zürich Art Museum (Kunsthaus Zürich) agreed with the heirs of the Jewish industrialist and art collector Carl Sachs on a 'just and fair solution' for the painting 'L'Homme à l'ombrelle' by Claude Monet, which is now to be sold under the terms of the amicable agreement.

Exhibitions and museums

Johann Karl Bossard added antique trading as a second pillar to his business as goldsmith in the 1880s, particularly important as one of the first important art dealers of the country. The contents of the goldsmith's workshop, the thousands of designs, models, prints and historical photos were added to the collection at the Swiss National Museum in 2013, documented in an extensive publication in 2023. A selection of this work is now being shown in the exhibition 'Brilliant craftsmanship. Bossard Goldsmiths Lucerne' at the Landesmuseum in Zürich until 6 April 2025. Among the large number of temporary exhibitions, another one at the Landesmuseum about Colonialism and 'Switzerland's Global Entanglements' has been particularly successful. It is a well-researched summary of the various connections with different regions and foreign countries. Nevertheless, the most visited museums in the country are the well-established museum of transports in Lucerne (Verkehrshaus) and the new chocolate 'museum' of the Lindt chocolate factory in Kilchberg near Zürich, the latter attracting more visitors than the Kunsthaus and the Landesmuseum together.

Many museums are renewing their permanent exhibitions. In Sainte-Croix, a new museum called MuMAPS about mechanical art and heritage opened its doors, reuniting three former museums. In Lugano, the Bally Foundation, organized its second exposition in the beautiful Villa Helenum, which will be a new tourist attraction in the Italian speaking part of the country, not far from the already 10-year-old and very lively art museum MASI in the same city.

Databases and inventories

The improvement of databases, inventories and online collections is a constant preoccupation for many museums. Among them, the private financed project of the national inventory of ceramic objects in Swiss public collections, Ceramica CH, is supporting the museums in continuing its inventory work in the major collections in the county of Berne. The ceramic collections of Neuchâtel, Vaud, Solothurn and Graubünden are already published online.

New guidebooks for museums edited by Swiss museums association VMS

- (1) Social sustainability in the museum.
- (2) Organizational sustainability in the museum.
- (3) Surveillance and reception.
- (4) As a result of the Project 'climate and museum': a new guidebook on monitoring data about climate corridors.

Christian Hörack

TURKEY

In 2024, the number of museums in Turkey increased to 640, compared to 606 in 2023. This total includes 210 state museums, 430 private museums, and 143 archaeological sites under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The proliferation of private museums highlights a growing demand for cultural and artistic diversity.

The Mevlana Museum in Konya became Turkey's most visited state museum in 2024, welcoming 2,634,355 domestic and international visitors throughout the year. Similarly, the ancient city of Ephesus, with 2,626,753 visitors in 2024, continues to draw global attention with its rich cultural heritage and historical significance.

Göbeklitepe was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018. Located near Örencik Village in Şanlıurfa, this prehistoric site, dating back approximately 12,000 years, has revolutionized our understanding of human history. As the world's oldest known centre of worship, Göbeklitepe reveals significant insights into the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agriculture and the influence of religious beliefs on the development of settled life.

Among the most remarkable findings at Göbeklitepe are its towering T-shaped pillars, some measuring 6 metres in height and weighing up to 40 tons. Adorned with carved depictions of humans and animals, these pillars showcase some of the earliest examples of relief art in history. In 2024, Göbeklitepe attracted 709,643 visitors, continuing to inspire global interest in this extraordinary site.

Due to the heightened interest in museums in 2024, the visiting hours for certain museums and archaeological sites under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism were adjusted during the tourism season. In many locations, the closing time was extended to 8:00 p.m. Notably, the visiting hours for the Ephesus and Hierapolis archaeological sites were extended until midnight, offering visitors a unique opportunity to explore these historic locations in the evening.

The Cultural Route Festival, organized by the Ministry of Culture, brought various artistic activities to different cities across Turkey. As part of the festival, a series of exhibitions and events took place in 16 cities on consecutive dates, providing a platform for cultural engagement and artistic expression. Looking ahead, the festival is set to expand in 2025, with plans to reach 20 cities, further enhancing its role in promoting cultural diversity and artistic creativity nationwide.

The 2024 municipal elections brought a shift in the political landscape, particularly in municipalities governed by the Republican administrations. These municipalities

adopted a more contemporary and experience-oriented approach to cultural and artistic activities, including museum exhibitions. In addition to introducing modern exhibition techniques, new museums showcasing modern art began to emerge. Notably, municipal museums have increasingly focused on industrial heritage sites, especially in cities like Istanbul, reflecting a renewed interest in preserving and interpreting urban and industrial history.

(<https://dacistanbul.com/endustri-mirasi-cubuklu-silolar-bogazin-yeni-kultur-sanat-duragi/> and https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasanpa%C5%9Fa_Gazhanesi)

Among museum professionals in 2024, two of the most prominent discussion topics have been *'measures for environmental sustainability in museums'* and *'museum accessibility'*. These discussions reflect a growing focus on adapting museum operations to align with global sustainability goals and ensuring inclusivity for diverse audiences.

Additionally, following the devastating earthquake in Turkey on February 6, 2023, the sector continues to deliberate on critical issues such as *'protective measures in museums against natural disasters'* and the *'inventory of historical structures'*. These discussions aim to enhance disaster preparedness and safeguard cultural heritage in vulnerable regions.

Dilek Yıldız Karakaş

UKRAINE

The challenges of Ukrainian museums at present differ drastically, as there are regions in the immediate proximity to the forefront, where there are artillery and aviation attacks, and there are those suffering merely (as harsh as that might sound) from drones and ballistics. The Ukrainian Museum Association focuses on those remaining in zones of the immediate risk.

Until 2024 Ukraine had no electronic registry of the museum fund, which meant that people trapped in occupation stayed there just to hide the data the enemy could use for destruction.

The main challenges:

- No safe storages.
- No protocols for evacuation that work (museum directors have no authority to evacuate without numerous parties engaged).
- Salaries (most museum workers and especially, directors – and often in many relocated and frontline museums its one person – have a salary slightly exceeding 150 Euros, yet once you are relocated and lost everything, it's 200 Euro, just rent...).
- Lack of international networking due to a sufficient language barrier.

The main achievements:

- Museums became a platform for social reintegration and people trust them.
- Museums became a safe-hub for inner-refugees and others – the first place to go.
- Museums have the biggest chance in many years (due to the evacuation and empty museum halls) to revise their post-Soviet exhibitions and make them modern.

The Ukrainian Museum Association (UMA), based in Kyiv is an independent non-governmental organisation with the mission of mediation between the main agents of Ukrainian cultural discourse, and specifically - employees of museums, galleries and cultural heritage experts. Its goal is to unite museums to develop and implement cultural heritage, education and cultural tourism projects. The initiative was formed in February 2022 to assist Ukrainian museum workers to save their collections and human resources. UMA was officially registered in 2024 with a focus on assisting Ukrainian museum workers and cultural heritage experts in networking, capacity-

building and skill-development with particular attention to displaced, damaged, destroyed or occupied museums, which work in exile, forming new collections and exhibitions. At present (February 2025) the UMA unites over 100 museum institutions, both national (such as the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra', the National Architecture-Historical Reserve 'Ancient Chernihiv' and the National Chernobyl museum), relocated museums from the temporarily occupied territories, such as Luhansk regional museum of local lore (twice relocated), Donetsk museum of local lore and Melitopol museum of local lore, and destroyed museums, such as the Okhtyrka museum of local lore, as assisting them with reestablishing of their institutions and renewing their collections is the major priority.

P.S. And I'm truly sorry if that's not the material you were looking for, but I'm in the middle of making a bunch of colleagues evacuate with their children, regardless of whether the collections have been safeguarded, which is definitely not the easiest thing to do, while being our priority.

Milena Chorna

UNITED KINGDOM

The Economy

Mirroring previous annual reports, the UK Museum sector has continued to face challenges in 2024. While the political turmoil of previous years was somewhat tempered by a General Election and change of government in July the economic landscape continues to be difficult, and a change of administration has yet to provide any initiatives that will have a serious positive impact on the heritage sector as the new Labour government struggles with its finances.

The autumn 2024 budget provided little comfort for the museum sector; nationally funded museums were guaranteed a standstill budget, but this was seen as effectively a 2-5% cut allowing for inflation. Increases in national insurance costs to be borne by employers have had a greater impact on the wider sector, and for local government-funded museums the situation is much bleaker, with councils having to make difficult financial decisions, resulting in reductions in opening hours, job cuts, and in some cases museum closures or threats of closures. Continuing increases in other costs related to energy, maintenance and insurance have affected museums of all types across the sector. Pressure on consumer budgets has meant that museums outside of London (where larger national museums are busy), especially those with admission charges, have struggled to achieve predicted visitor targets due to the continuing cost of living crisis this year.

Repatriation & Decolonization

The Elgin Marbles saga at the British Museum continues without resolution; elsewhere museums work with communities from various places to discuss and the repatriation and interpretation of collections. Two contrasting examples of this work were the Horniman Museum in London and the Pitt Rivers Collection in Oxford. The Horniman Museum returned a collection of items from the Waramungu people to Australia this year, while a seven-year collaboration at the Pitt Rivers with people from the Maasi tradition in Kenya concluded with the group deciding that the museum should retain 118 objects with new co-curated interpretation.

Workforce Diversity

While debate continues around the decolonization of collections and interpretation, a report issued by the sector body Historic England also highlighted structural issues around the diversity of the heritage sector workforce. The report recorded that 90% of respondents identified as white, and only 1% as black or black British. Just over 20% of the workforce could be identified as disabled. The report concluded that there was

a real need for a more inclusive approach to recruitment, attracting a more diverse range of candidates.

Cyber Attacks

Museums and libraries in the UK and elsewhere in the world remain on high alert following a number of high profile and damaging computer ransomware attacks. The British Library IT system suffered a very serious attack early in the year which has cost more than £1million to address and systems related to online catalogues are still not fully resolved. In November, the National Museum of the Royal Navy, which includes five museums, was also attacked with less serious implications.

Protests and Attacks

A number of museums have suffered attacks and vandalism from protesters in 2025; the National Gallery has been targeted by activists protesting at both the continuing war in Gaza, and Climate Change. The Just Stop Oil group threw soup over Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, triggering a national and sector-wide ethical debate about the issue. Other museums have faced criticism and protests related to exhibition sponsorship by oil and energy companies; the Science Museum has had particular attention due to funding for an exhibition by the Indian oil giant Adami, although it also ended its long-running relationship with the Norwegian energy firm Equinor in 2025.

Tim Bryan