



ENCATC

The European network on cultural
management and policy

2025

Congress Proceedings

The Future Is Cultural:
Policy, Practice, and
Education

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ENCATC

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“The Future Is Cultural: Policy, Practice, and Education”

A compilation of papers presented in the framework of the 15th Annual ENCATC Education and Research Session and published by ENCATC.

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Only the works presented at the 2025 Education and Research Session for which a full paper was submitted are included here (submission of full paper is not compulsory for presentation at the E&RS).

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Published by ENCATC

September 2025

ENCATC

Avenue Maurice, 1

1050 Brussels Belgium

info@encatc.org

www.encatc.org

Printed in Brussels.

ISBN: 978-92-990088-8-1

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Editorial

The Future Is Cultural: Policy, Practice, and Education

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The 2025 ENCATC Congress, hosted in Barcelona under the title “Cultural Policy and Management for Regenerative Futures,” marked a significant step forward in reflecting on the role of culture in our rapidly changing world. As part of this broader event, the 16th ENCATC Education and Research Session confirms its standing as a vibrant platform for academic dialogue and interdisciplinary exploration, bringing researchers, educators, and cultural professionals together to collectively reflect on the transformative potential of cultural policy, management, and education.

At a time when interconnected global crises call for more agile, inclusive, and long-term approaches to development, the papers presented during this year’s E&RS provided a dedicated space for examining culture contribution to shaping our futures, through rigorous academic inquiry, pedagogical innovation, and sectoral reflection. It created opportunities for bridging disciplines, contexts, and generations, encouraging a rethinking of cultural ecosystems through the lens of sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity.

An important characteristic of this year’s sessions is their link with the themes of MONDIACULT 2025 conference, which will be held in Barcelona shortly after ENCATC Congress and to which our reflection as a network has the ambition to contribute. Indeed, the 2025 E&RS emphasized the importance of integrating cultural research into broader societal agendas. Moreover, during the spring-summer period ENCATC organized six focus groups with the aim to work on proposals linked to the six themes that were identified by MONDIACULT as priority for discussion. The alignment between the two initiatives, although at different levels, is based on the recognition that the cultural field cannot be peripheral to debates on climate, technology, equity, education or democracy. Rather,

it must be integrated and sometimes central to them. Through research and education, we gain the tools to navigate this complexity, to interpret shifting realities, and to imagine new frameworks for action.

This commitment was reflected in the rich and diverse participation in this year's E&RS. With 138 presentations selected for inclusion in the congress program, submitted by contributors from 38 countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the session demonstrated the truly global reach of the ENCATC network. These presentations were structured across 28 thematic research sessions, which addressed a wide array of contemporary concerns from digital transformation in museums and climate-conscious cultural policies, to grassroots cultural diplomacy and community-based heritage initiatives. The sessions are indeed shaped around calls for contribution on the topics of culture and quality of life, cultural justice and cultural rights, strategic management and organisation governance, cultural policy and governance, audience analysis and cultural participation, cultural entrepreneurship and cultural economics, digitalisation and innovation in culture, The role of culture facing contemporary crises, and culture and education

The current book of proceedings brings together the 30 full papers submitted for the book, which exemplify the intellectual diversity and relevance of the discussions that took place during the session. These contributions reflect not only the thematic richness of the Congress, but also its methodological pluralism, showcasing case studies, theoretical analyses, practice-based reflections, and policy-oriented critiques. Together, they represent a multi-perspective engagement with the question of how culture can be a resource for sustainability, identity, innovation, and social regeneration.

This publication also bears witness to the strength of ENCATC's academic and professional community. The contributions accepted for presentation during the E&RS are based on a rigorous peer-review process, guided by an international scientific committee, ensuring high scholarly standards and a balance between emerging and established voices. Many of the authors featured here represent leading research institutions, while others are deeply embedded in the cultural field as practitioners, making this volume a valuable resource at the intersection of theory and practice.

Yet, beyond the metrics of participation or the academic quality of contributions, what stands out most is the Session's capacity to connect research with the deeper purposes of education. Within ENCATC's institutional DNA lies the belief that cultural policy and management must be shaped not only by empirical insights and conceptual clarity, but also by pedagogical responsibility. This means training the next generation of cultural leaders not only in technical skills, but also in ethical engagement, critical reflection, and social awareness.

Thus, this year's Session reaffirmed how essential it is to nurture research that informs education, and education that inspires research. At the same time, it illustrated the ongoing importance of linking

scientific discourse with policy and practice, a connection that ENCATC has long championed. Many of the papers in this volume speak directly to this triadic relationship—offering research that is academically robust, educationally grounded, and practically applicable. This unique positioning allows the Education and Research Session to serve as both a forum for knowledge production and a catalyst for real-world transformation.

As the cultural sector continues to grapple with uncertainty and transition, the role of spaces like the E&RS becomes ever more vital. They are not merely academic gatherings, but laboratories for imagining and testing new possibilities. They offer scholars and educators the opportunity to think beyond disciplinary silos, to question inherited frameworks, and to design new narratives of change.

In a nutshell, the 2025 Education and Research Session reaffirms its role as an essential pillar of the ENCATC Congress and a relevant moment for those committed to cultural investigation, practice, policy and innovation. As the work of these scholars continues to ripple into classrooms, cultural institutions, policy arenas, and communities, we are reminded that the future is not something to be observed, but something to be shaped. And education and research, when meaningfully connected, remain among the most powerful tools we have to shape it.

Reimagining the National Museum of Chad: Cultural Mediation as a Catalyst for Identity, Inclusion, and Youth Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The present article documents and evaluates ongoing cultural mediation efforts in the framework of the GIZ led “Lel Afé -Culture and Crises Prevention” project with the Musée National du Chad, implemented by LAPISLAZUL. In a country, facing instability, a young population and high illiteracy rates, the museum plays a pivotal societal role in communicating cultural heritage to Chadians. Despite economic challenges to collection management, loss and looting, the museum remains a very important public institution for understanding Chad's rich cultural heritage. Using a holistic and participative approach, a wide range of co-creation and digital activities to reconnect locals with their heritage, the project action is aimed at making museum exhibitions more instructive, participatory and inspiring. To ensure future sustainability, a roadmap is elaborated with the museum to better embed their research and work in a broader national as well as international South-South and European cooperation framework.

Keywords:

Museum, Cultural
Heritage in Crisis,
Cultural Participation
Youth, Cultural
Identity, Digital
Innovation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper has been published in the framework of the 2025 ENCATC Annual Congress (15-17 September 2025, Barcelona) on the theme of "Cultural Policy and Management for Regenerative Futures".

1. Introduction



FIGURE 1. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHAD, N'DJAMENA, museum parc (2025), Credit: Samba SOUMBOUNOU, Kandara'Lab

Over the past decades the role of museums has evolved considerably from ICOM's early emphasis on the five museum functions defined as *“acquiring, conserving, studying, exhibiting and transmitting the knowledge on museum artefacts”*. The most recent ICOM museum definition outlines an additional and stronger focus on the inclusion and participation of the public:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.¹(ICOM, 2022)

¹ In Prague, on 24 August 2022, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM approved the proposal for the new museum definition.

Testimony to this strengthening social role of the museum is also reflected in the recent UNESCO (2024) initiative to adopt a revised functional framework. UNESCO defines the adapted priorities for the museum of the 21st century as focusing on preservation, research, communication and education. In particular the latter two, communication and education, have become crucial in the transition to a museum of the 21st century, adapted to a new understanding of the societal role of the museum as well as the changing needs of its audiences.

Since the early 2000's, cultural and museum mediation has started to play an increasingly relevant role in the portfolio of museum services. One of the aims was to facilitate access and to remove traditionally perceived rigid hierarchies, while countering a growing reluctance of broader audiences to engage with traditional displays of museum exhibition content (Addis & De Stefano, 2023). The idea of top-down presentation of museum collections has gradually shifted and moved to a more inclusive perspective, making presentations of museum collections more widely accessible, relatable and understandable. Active involvement with museum objects and shaping individual cultural object related narratives has created a greater sense of ownership of common culture and promoting better mutual understanding.

Other relevant benefits to this stronger engagement of the museum with its audiences are linked to the fact that audiences which better understand their own cultural heritage are more open towards exploring and accepting other cultures. This aspect is particularly relevant in connecting younger generations (e.g. school children, students) to their cultural identity. As the museum has become increasingly more digital (Maina, 2020) and interactive (i.e., since Covid-19), the playful, interactive promotion of educational content in low-barrier and accessible venues has bolstered attendance of the young. While digital technology is important for innovative approaches in cultural mediation, the inclusion of participatory processes management, production and dissemination of museum work are also key aspects for more inclusion (González-Piñero & Bonet, 2021).

African museums are increasingly recognizing the importance of engaging differently with their local communities (Gbossou, 2007). The understanding among museum professionals has gained traction that success with local public depends on incorporating better the unique perspectives of African audiences and shaping museum programs in participative collaboration with them. To achieve the goal of greater participation and higher sense of ownership, there is a growing consensus on the need for African audiences to make their own interpretations of African history and contribute to collective memory making by shaping and reflecting African cultural identities in the 21st century (Maina, 2019).

2. Cultural and museum mediation in African museum context



FIGURE 2. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHAD, N'DJAMENA, Guided tours (March 2025), Credit: Samba SOUMBOUNOU, Kandara'Lab

The African museum sector has been undergoing significant change since the end of colonialism, with a notable shift towards decolonization (Ossebi, 1996), inclusivity, and community engagement (Diagne & Amselle, 2018; Van Nijen, 2020). This transformation gained momentum in the late 20th century, particularly after the 1980s, and continues into the present day (Aithnard, 1976). However, several factors are still hampering the work of African museums, in particular the legacy of colonialism as collections often reflect the power dynamics and biases of that period. Moreover, inadequate funding limits the museum's ability to properly care for their collections and insufficient capacity

building is creating important challenges to African museum management.² The lack of adequate financial and human resources is then reflected in often insufficient engagement with local audiences and international museum communities.

The National Museum of Chad,³ founded in the 1960's, shares these constraints with a wide range of African cultural institutions. Although holding an impressive collection of ca. 6000 artifacts of folk art, palaeontology, archaeology, Sao art, ethnology, Islamic heritage, folk arts and crafts,⁴ it has often struggled to play an active role in the country's educational and social ecosystems. On one hand, it is its main mission as a public cultural institution to implement the government's policy of conserving, protecting and promoting Chad's rich cultural assets (Lebeuf, 1965 : 150). To this end, the museum collects cultural objects (e.g., old manuscripts of the Koran, armour of the Moundang warrior etc.) documents and promotes them through permanent and temporary exhibitions. On the other hand, achieving these objectives successfully depends heavily on availability of adequate technical and financial resources, which the museum has been largely lacking.⁵

It is the aim of the "Lél Afé – Culture and Crisis Prevention" - project led by GIZ⁶ to address some of these key challenges in collaboration with the National Museum of Chad. As a country which has been experiencing ongoing political crises and economic hardship,⁷ promoting social cohesion with shared culture while fostering involvement, education and participation of civil society via Chadian cultural heritage is considered a relevant means of preventing future crises. With a particular view on

² Many African nations struggle to allocate adequate resources to cultural institutions like museums due to competing priorities like education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (UNESCO, 2025).

³ The National Museum of Chad was created on October 6th, 1962 by Decree n°180/PG-EN and by Ordinance n°004/PR/2016 of September 15, 2016, establishing thus the Maison des Patrimoines Culturels du Tchad (MPCT), the National Museum of Chad is part of the merged institutions namely the Bibliothèque Nationale du Tchad (BNT), the Bureau Tchadien du Droit d'Auteur (BUTDRA) and the Centre National de la Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle (CENALPAC) and the Direction de la Diffusion et de la Communication (DDC). The mission of the National Museum of Chad is to collect, preserve, enhance and promote Chad's cultural heritage (Journal du Tchad, 1962 ; LEBEUF, 1965).

⁴ Among the highly prized objects preserved at the National Museum is the skull of the *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, Toumai. It is kept in the room dedicated to paleoanthropology. Alongside Toumai's skull is that of a carnivorous crocodile, dating back 7 million years.

⁵ For instance, subsidies allocated to the National Museum have been used in the past to pay staff salaries of contract workers, while the activities set out in the museum action plan, related to the promotion, preservation and communication of cultural heritage, were not adequately carried out.

⁶ "Lél afé" is a project focusing on culture and crisis prevention, implemented by GIZ (Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit) in Chad with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office. Its main aim is to strengthen social cohesion and prevent conflict by involving young people as well as civil society in cultural activities (e.g. training journalists in the cultural sector, workshops with artists, journalists and human rights activists, etc.) (GIZ, 2025).

⁷ Chad faces great security challenges and numerous obstacles to its development. In the Sahel region, for example, climate change is causing food insecurity, social tensions and rising poverty. Chad is estimated to be the most climate-vulnerable country in the world, highly exposed to climate and crises, including floods, droughts, and conflict (WORLD BANK, 2024)

the high number of young populations in Chad,⁸ the “Lél Afé” - project has chosen a particular focus on reconnecting young Chadians with their culture as: *“Young people are particularly susceptible to attempts at political exploitation (...) – above all because they lack the anchor points to identify positively with the country's cultural diversity”* (GIZ, 2024). Young Chadians lack sufficient possibilities to interact, engage and identify positively with their heritage. The overarching goal is therefore to foster cultural exchange and provide an open communication platform for different narratives on Chadian heritage as *“understanding of cultures is crucial in order to understand other values, beliefs and customs and thus prevent crises in Chad”* (GIZ, 2024).

3. Objectives of cultural and museum mediation with the Musée national du Chad

⁸ In Chad, approximately 46.7% of the population is under the age of 15, with a significant proportion of children and adolescents (UNFPA, 2025).



FIGURE 3. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHAD, N'DJAMENA, Guided tours (March 2025), Credit: Samba SOUMBOUNOU, Kandara'Lab

The larger general framework of “Lel Afé “ (GIZ) seeks to reposition the National Museum of Chad (incl. the National Library) as inclusive and participatory spaces, where museum activities are primarily community-rooted. The action plan focuses therefore on four areas:

- Capacity-building: Support for museum staff with respect to professional management of museum collections, fostering exchanges with other (African and European) museums as well as transmission of cultural mediation techniques.
- Living heritage transmission: Creation of a “Village des Artistes et Artisans Tchadiens (Chadian Arts and Crafts village)” (VAAT)⁹ at the National Museum’s premises, imagined as a shared space dedicated to the transmission of living heritage (via open workshops, exhibitions, and cultural encounters). It promotes in particular local craftsmanship and serves as a permanent cultural hub.
- Local audience engagement: Planning and organization of a cultural programme (incl. guided tours) for the unique permanent exhibition with respect to the fossil of Toumaï (Brunet, 2002).¹⁰

⁹ The creation of the VAAT is currently still in the pilot phase and expected to be implemented - in alignment with the local Chadian climate conditions, as of September 2025 (after the rainy season).

¹⁰ Toumaï, also known by the scientific name *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, is the name given to a primate fossil discovered in Chad in 2001. This fossil, dating from around 7 million years ago, is considered to be one of the oldest known representatives of the human lineage. Its name, Toumaï, means “hope of life” in the Goran language.

- Young audience engagement: Educational excursions for school children from the N'Djaména area to the National Museum (within a maximum radius of 25 km, 1,000 pupils, in 5 days).

Within this broader framework of “Lel Afé”, LAPISLAZUL's cultural and museum mediation team has the important sub-objective of reinforcing the professional capacities of the museum staff to effectively promote its unique collections.

The proposed activities are thus largely aimed at training the museum staff and providing them with a set of skills for a successful cultural mediation of Chadian heritage. On the one hand, the proposed training activities ensure that valuable skills are passed on and that the National Museum remains not only a place of conservation and preservation, but also of research and education. On the other hand, the acquisition of strong personal and digital communication skills for mediation and museum co-creation purposes is essential to create and maintain a shared vision, ensuring a lasting legacy of the museum as an important facilitator and mediator between Chadian culture and its people.

4. Methodology for cultural and museum mediation in Chad

The approach adopted was grounded in principles of participatory action research, emphasizing co-construction of knowledge and capacity-building with stakeholders.

A number of concrete actions was envisaged, after thorough analysis of needs and in direct dialogue with the museum staff and senior management:

- Enhancing professional expertise in exhibition design and museum education
- Improving knowledge sharing among museum staff and educators (internally), including exchange of best practices and communication of research findings with other cultural institutions (externally)
- Increasing digital literacy of museum staff to facilitate dialogue, exchange and networking as well as bolstering their communication skills by using digital technologies for more effective local public engagement

In order to enhance local community engagement in particular, museum's engagement practices needed better adaptation to local needs and realities. Concrete actions were determined after continuous and direct dialogue (on line and on site) with museum management and staff:

- Analysis on profile and needs of current audiences, establishing the potential for welcoming a broader range of visitors while respecting diversity and inclusion as well as museum's human resources
- Developing and implementing an on-site training program for museum staff on cultural and museum mediation methods, documentation of collections (incl. archiving)
- Organising a series of conferences on contemporary challenges of cultural and museum mediation in Chad in the larger context of the restitution of African heritage
- Developing a public outreach program "Chad as seen by Chadians" (e.g., via organised cultural heritage excursions, establishing VAAT as a creative hub etc.)

4.1 Preparatory action for on-site field work

This mission was preceded by an essential preparatory phase (December 2024 - February 2025), which was marked by several strategic exchanges between the LAPISLAZUL experts, the GIZ and the museum's management. The meetings defined a coherent framework and scheduled museum mediation activities in the course of 2025. It was followed by extensive exchanges with the museum staff to identify the institution's specific needs. To this end two questionnaires were prepared and distributed:

- Target: museum's staff with the aim to assess the level of their general skills and, more specifically, museum mediation knowledge
- Target: Chadian general public with the aim to gather their perceptions, expectations and needs vis-à-vis the National Museum

The preparatory online survey was somewhat limited at this stage.¹¹ It was launched as a first probe into the perceptions of the local community, living in the vicinity to the museum (25 km radius). It is to be understood as a first pilot to be subsequently fine-tuned and proposed to be implemented again at larger scale during future initiatives with the museum.

After conducting this initial survey, we received a number of responses from civil servants, families with children, young professionals (artists, mediators), and stakeholders working in the cultural and educational sector (teachers, museum staff, etc.). This variety provided valuable first insights, offering a perspective on the diversity of visitor profiles (incl. age, gender) and their expectations regarding the National Museum. While the overall number of respondents was not very high due to limited time and resources for implementation, the survey points into an interesting larger picture. It was in

¹¹ Due to limited preparation time, human and financial as well as logistical difficulties of travelling to Chad, a more in-depth understanding of the challenges for the local museum in N'Djamena as well as its audiences merits further in-depth examinations which are currently out of scope for this project.

particular interesting to establish that the museum was visited “more than three times” by a majority of respondents in 2024 for “educational purposes and research.”

At the time of writing this paper (July 2025), another survey is ongoing, with the specific aim to include school and university audiences, as well as so-called “underserved” or low-literacy populations (World Bank, 2024).¹² The latter are often distanced from institutional cultural offerings and very difficult to reach. The goal is to better tailor the museum’s mediation efforts to the full spectrum of Chadian society.

4.2 Diagnostic Analysis (March 2025): Strengths and Challenges

During the first field trip the LAPISLAZUL team adopted an inclusive and participatory methodological approach that combined several complementary strategies. Firstly, on-site meetings were organised with various key stakeholders, both internally (museum staff, interns, department heads) and externally (museum partner institutions, cultural operators, artists, researchers). The main focus was to establish a clearer view and start mapping Chad’s cultural and artistic landscape, which due to the mentioned difficult economic, political as well as social conditions in Chad are rather challenging. Secondly, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with museum staff with the aim to identify which current needs have to be prioritized as well as exploring how to build on their underutilized existing skills. This multi-layered approach allowed for a clearer and more collective understanding of the concrete challenges for the National Museum.

Overall, the March 2025 mission identified some key institutional strengths such as a great potential of the institution to become a modern, versatile museum. Not only does it have an outstanding collection of Chadian cultural heritage (i.e., Toumaï), it also has a very committed core team of museum professionals, guides, technicians, and interns.¹³ Most notably, the museum benefits strongly from a group of interns, which it hosts every year. They provide invaluable support for the

¹² The adult literacy rate in Chad is estimated to be around 27.28%, i.e. only roughly 27% of the population aged 15 and above can read and write. Chad as many other African countries is facing a learning crisis. Learning poverty, the share of children not able to read and understand an age-appropriate text by age 10, is estimated by the World Bank, UNESCO, and other organizations at 94% (World Bank, 2022)

¹³ Currently, the museum is run by a team of 21 personnel (including 6 women), who cover a wide range of activities from museum management, administration, conservation and visitor reception.

museum's various everyday missions, contributing to its dynamism and the transmission of knowledge to school children and adolescents.

However, several major limitations to the drive to become a contemporary, participative and co-creative museum institution were noted. One of the main difficulties encountered during this mission was the limited availability of key museum staff to contribute to the mapping of concrete needs and future expectations of local museum audiences. Another key critical issue was the absence of reliable internet access.¹⁴ This stands as an important symbolic barrier, reflecting a broader challenge faced by many museums in Africa and particularly in Chad: the gap between available infrastructure and contemporary museum practices. This is particularly problematic as this limits not only the digital shift (Lawson 2020 : iv)¹⁵ (e.g. promoting education on cultural heritage via digital means) but also essential basic museum outreach (locally and internationally) to its wider audiences. Besides limitations to the technical museum infrastructure, there is also a lack of collection curation, e.g., age adapted pedagogical materials tailored, in particular young. Moreover, the museum exhibition spaces lack clear signage and strategic organisation of the exhibits to support clear narratives for education purposes. Also, there are inconsistent and monolingual (French only) signs as well as insufficient explanatory texts relating to the exhibits.

4.3. Cultural Mediation Training (May 2025)

¹⁴ Chad has one of the world's lowest rates of internet connectivity. As of early 2025, only about 13% of Chadians use the internet, compared to a global average around 60%. (Internet Society, 2025)

¹⁵ While in European museums use of digital technology was made very early on (i.e. conservation and curation of museum collections), in Africa the adoption and implementation of digital technology only took place more recently, in the early years of 2010's.



FIGURE 4. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHAD, N'DJAMENA, cultural mediation training (May 2025), Credit: Samba SOUMBOUNOU, Kandara'Lab

Building on the first findings and analysis, the second on-site visit to N'Djamena in May 2025 centred on cultural mediation training. It was envisaged to equip museum staff (future mediators) with skills to understand diverse perspectives, and adapt their approach to different sets of audiences (e.g., gender, age, nationality (tourist vs. local)). The training was thus aimed to lead to more successful mediations, reducing misunderstandings, creating stronger, more sustainable relationships between individuals and groups from different backgrounds. The training programme revolved around three main pillars:

1. Off-site cultural mediation: towards creation of a “Village of Artists and Artisans” (VAAT) - This training module positioned the museum as a future community hub. It envisions a range of outdoor activities, collaborative art exhibitions, and creating closer ties with local artists/creatives for transferring skills and know-how. Among others, external professionals from other African museums were invited to share best practices and experiences based on concrete cases, such as:

- Banque Al-Maghrib Museum (Morocco): school mediation, educational tools
- Oudayas Museum and Carl Fick Museum (Morocco): curation, conservation, and audience development

2. Interactive educational excursions - participants were invited to develop new formats for museum visits for schools, including creation of thematic paths aligned with national school curricula, supported by updated printed and digital tools (e.g., posters, brochures, QR codes). The workshops also included presentation of museum mediation strategies, adapted educational tools (digital and interactive) as well as educational excursions.

3. Educational games and playful learning - young participants engaged in a treasure hunt in the museum gardens and an escape game about the Toumaï fossil. The games are aimed to enhance

better cognitive retention of content through interactive learning. Some of the tangible results included the creation of the “Little Chadian Archaeologist” handbook, development of different treasure hunt paths and educational game tools, as well as a video on “5 Reasons to visit the Museum”.

4.4 Colloquium National Museum of Chad (July 2025)

The colloquium scheduled for mid-July 2025¹⁶ at the National Museum of Chad is aimed to raise public awareness about the richness and importance of Chadian cultural heritage, strengthen the connection between the museum and the population, and initiate a national dialogue on the restitution of cultural property (SARR, 2018 : 39).¹⁷ The academic conference is titled "Chadian Cultural Heritage Today: Challenges, Preservation and Restitution."

¹⁶ At the time of writing this paper, the conference and events in N'Djamena are still ongoing. We hope to present the final results at the ENCATC conference in September 2025, Barcelona.

¹⁷ Felwine Sarr and art historian Bénédicte Savoy estimate that 90,000 African works of art currently held in European museums could be returned to their country of origin. For instance, with 9,296 works of art listed in the collections of musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (Paris), Chad would be first in line concerned by restitution.

Journées nationale du patrimoine au Tchad

اليوم الوطني للتراث في تشاد

Le Samedi 19 juillet 2025
السبت 19 يوليو 2025

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Journée portes ouvertes
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Visites guidées des expositions du musée pour Adultes et enfants
جولات إرشادية: استكشفوا معارض المتحف برفقة مرشدين متخصصين للكمبار والصغار

Gratuite مجاني



LE HANUEL DU PETIT ARCHÉOLOGUE TCHADEN
الكتاب الصغير للباحثين في تشاد

Présentation des Nouveaux outils de médiation culturelle du musée
عروض تفاعلية: تعرفوا على الأدوات الجديدة للوساطة الثقافية في المتحف

Gratuite مجاني



Chasse au trésor
jeux de pistes activités ludo-pédagogiques autour de Toumaï
البحث عن الكنز: شاركوا في ألعاب ترفيهية وتعليمية حول "توماي" واكتشفوا أسرار الماضي

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Projet Lili-ili - Culture et Préservation des Croix



FIGURE 5. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHAD, N'DJAMENA, Chadian Cultural Heritage Days (July 2025), Credit: Samba SOUMBOUNOU, Kandara'Lab

Organized in a format combining keynote lectures, thematic round tables, and interactive workshops, the event will bring together researchers, national and international heritage professionals, a range of cultural institutions, and a diverse general public.

The conference and related activities seek to foster stronger ties between the museum, citizens, and institutions at national, regional, and international levels. Through open discussions and shared contributions, it aspires to start a dialogue, enhance collective understanding of preservation challenges, and generate long-term concrete recommendations on restitution of Chadian cultural goods. The outcomes of discussions and presentations, which will be produced during the colloquium and conference, will be compiled and published in a volume titled “The Heritage Notebooks”, marking a key milestone toward a more inclusive and forward-looking cultural policy.

5. Impact and Evaluation of Cultural Mediation activities in Chad

The Chadian museum case demonstrates how several key dimensions around Innovation, Resilience, and South-South Cooperation¹⁸ are crucial for the African museum context:

Pedagogical innovation: via hands-on and context-specific training;

Institutional resilience: overcoming severe resource limitations through capacity building, creativity and outreach

African South–South collaboration: importance of knowledge exchange and best practices between Chadian, Moroccan, and Cameroonian professionals;

Local, national as well as international museum outreach, through community engagement (in person and digital)

While the cultural mediation project with the National Museum of Chad is going into the final months of implementation, some of the obtained results are already noteworthy:

Cultural mediation capacity building (after several field trips and on-site visits) has achieved the creation of a more collaborative and creative culture among the museum staff, who feel more connected to the museum's social mission and now self-identify as “cultural mediators”.

Upskilling of the museum's staff members has provided staff with crucial curatorial agency (e.g., creating engaging visitor programmes, providing explanatory displays and educational insights).

Inclusivity is emphasized for persons with disabilities and attention given to multilingual displays.

Training with easily accessible digital tools (Canva, CapCut, QR code generation) and creation of mobile-friendly content for visitor interaction has greatly facilitated outreach and communication.

Design of tangible mediation tools (some as of July 2025 still in development) such as short videos in vlog format aimed at audiences with little or no literacy, informative posters and visuals produced by using simple, free digital tools (Canva, CapCut, InShot, etc.) has led to several digital mediation tool prototypes. These were created during the co-design workshops such as the “Museum Passport” for children (with stamps and stickers), the “Little Chadian Archaeologist Handbook”, an educational poster outlining excursion routes, a video script: “5 Reasons to Visit the Museum” as well as a guidebook for museum mediators.

6. Conclusion

¹⁸ The United Nations define South-South cooperation as the technical cooperation among developing countries in the Global South. It is a tool used by the states, international organizations, academics, civil society and the private sector to collaborate and share knowledge, skills and successful initiatives in specific areas such as agricultural development, human rights, urbanization, health, climate change etc.

The “Lel Afé – Culture and Crisis Prevention” initiative marks an important milestone in rethinking the role of the National Museum of Chad, particularly through the cultural mediation activities conceived and implemented on the ground by the expert team of LAPISLAZUL. Through a series of tailored interventions - including training, co-creation workshops, participatory exhibitions, and youth engagement programs - the project has not only equipped museum staff with new tools and skills, but has also reactivated the museum’s social mission as a space of dialogue, learning, and cultural affirmation.

At the heart of this transformation lies the recognition that cultural heritage is not merely a repository of the past, but a living and dynamic resource essential for shaping identity and promoting social cohesion. In the Chadian context, where historical fractures, economic hardship, and limited civic infrastructure have weakened communal ties, reconnecting people, especially the younger generation, with their heritage provides a vital anchor. It fosters a deeper sense of belonging, encourages mutual understanding, and becomes a foundation upon which a sustainable culture of peace can be built.

The implementation in Chad demonstrated that cultural mediation, when approached in a participatory and local community-based manner, can generate tangible and meaningful impact also with limited human and technical resources. From empowering museum professionals to designing engaging digital tools adapted to low-literacy population and youth, the project has helped reposition the National Museum as a catalyst for inclusion and social transformation.

However, it is crucial to underline that such initiatives must not remain isolated efforts. If we are to realize their full potential, cultural heritage must be seen as a strategic pillar for long-term development and conflict prevention. Only by embedding this perspective into national cultural policy and international cooperation frameworks, especially through sustained South-South and Africa-Europe collaboration, can it ensure continuity, scalability, and real social impact.

The Chadian experience, as facilitated by LAPISLAZUL, offers a powerful reminder: culture is not a secondary concern, but a fundamental driver of societal resilience, cultural identity, and peace. It is a collective resource that must be nurtured, shared, and activated through inclusive and sustained engagement with the communities it belongs to. By amplifying the voices of Chadian youth and communities through mediation, the National Museum of Chad is not just conserving history, but helps co-create the future of the African museum in the 21st century.

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Measuring Culture's Contribution to Climate Action and Sustainability: A reflection on Sustainability Reporting Practices in the Cultural and Creative Ecosystems

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the topic of corporate cultural initiatives and cultural support, as part of sustainability strategies of private companies, and the challenges and difficulties in disclosing and communicating them, reprising the concept of Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR) as a potential dimension of corporate sustainability strategies. Through a qualitative, action research methodology, the paper explores the case study of the Corporate Cultural Responsibility Committee launched by Associazione Civita in Italy with the scientific advice of ObSARC Observatory. The study aims at providing preliminary insights on how companies address the challenge of integrating cultural actions, as well as evaluating and communicating the impact of their cultural initiatives. The findings highlight the strategic interest of CCR for private companies, while revealing critical barriers such as the absence of standardized indicators and weak integration into corporate reporting frameworks. Preliminary results suggest that further investigation is needed to create context-sensitive and hybrid approaches to ensure meaningful and comparable disclosures and communication. The research contributes to the literature on corporate cultural engagement and offers practical guidance for advancing CCR practices in corporate contexts.

Keywords:

Corporate Cultural
Responsibility (CCR)

Sustainability Reporting

Cultural Indicators

Cultural Sustainability

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the representatives of the companies included in the Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility, in particular the Coordinator of the Committee, AdR and Associazione Civita, for sharing data and participating in the research project.

Introduction

In recent decades, the intersection of cultural engagement and corporate sustainability has evolved from a marginal aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to a recognized dimension of strategic business conduct, exemplified by the concept of Corporate Cultural Responsibility (Kohl, 2007; Associazione Civita, 2017). This transformation reflects a broader shift in which culture is increasingly acknowledged not only as an implicit and instrumental nuance of sustainable

development but also as a driving force of social, environmental, and economic regeneration. Within this context, the concept of Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR) has emerged, emphasizing the role of private companies as active contributors to cultural ecosystems and culture-led sustainable innovation.

Despite this growing relevance, the measurement and communication of cultural initiatives of private companies within sustainability frameworks remain underdeveloped, transversally among non-cultural private sector entities. While sustainability reporting practices for cultural organizations have gained scholarly attention and several culture-related sustainability reporting frameworks have emerged (Cerquetti & Montella, 2021), there is still limited research on how companies outside the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) integrate cultural indicators into their non-financial sustainability disclosures. This gap results in fragmented data, *ad hoc* metrics, and limited comparability, thereby undermining the strategic and communicative potential of cultural investments.

This paper aims to explore how private companies are dealing with these issues, and what are potential steps ahead for providing a more solid approach to these challenges. In particular, this contribution aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do private companies integrate cultural initiatives within their broader strategies?

RQ2: What are the main barriers to measuring and communicating the cultural impact of corporate initiatives?

RQ3 Can standardized or context-sensitive indicators be effectively employed to enhance the visibility and comparability of CCR practices?

Through the analysis carried out by the authors on the first works of the *Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR Committee)* promoted by *Associazione Civita*, the analysis investigates how companies are navigating the challenges of inserting, evaluating and reporting their cultural engagement within sustainability frameworks. Drawing on qualitative research, including desk analysis and action research, the study explores both the strategic motivations behind CCR and the operational problems companies face in communicating cultural actions.

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study; Section 3 illustrates the research design and methodology; Section 4 outlines and discusses the research results; finally, Section 5 presents concluding remarks and outlines future research paths.

Theoretical framework

Over the years, the collaboration between private companies, cultural organizations and artists has evolved from a mere support (e.g. donations), to sponsorship (Genest, 2005), into real cooperation in the form of partnerships and shared projects (Austin, 2000; Borin, 2017; Valeri, 2022)

Private companies' contributions are typically non-compulsory and are motivated by a complex interplay of factors, including Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives, brand positioning, stakeholder engagement, and broader reputational strategies (Wright, Walmsley, & Simmons, 2022). Such support can take various forms, including monetary sponsorships, endowments, in-kind contributions, or more complex strategic partnerships. While usually sponsorships are characterized as transactional, involving the provision of resources (often monetary) in exchange for promotional exposure, aiming to generate a positive reputation for businesses, partnership are instead more complex collaborations based on objectives of social value creation, fostering shared resources, risks, and mutual goals, leading to more meaningful engagement and potentially greater social impact (Surman, 2006). Partnerships are thus considered more appealing both for cultural organizations, artists, and private companies thanks to their collaborative, interactive nature, which better aligns with preferences for active dialogue and shared experiences (Austin, 2000; Borin, 2017).

In these cases, value alignment between the company and cultural organizations or artists, and organizational credibility significantly strengthen the positive effect of collaborations on the reputation of both partners, with credibility having the strongest moderating effect in the choice of pursuing and continuing the collaboration (Wang and Kaspar-Pascal, 2020). In several cases, the contribution of private companies is regarded as a complementary mechanism to public funding, especially in contexts where state support for the arts is limited or declining (Gianecchini, 2020; Romolini et al. 2020).

Reconsidering the role of private companies in cultural support and development has been considered both related to the idea of cultural ecosystems (Borin and Donato 2015 and 2022; De Bernard, Comunian, & Gross, 2022), and as a part of CSR strategies (Alshawaaf & Lee, 2024; Wang, 2019).

The research stream on cultural and creative ecosystems (Anders-Morawska, 2017; Borin and Donato, 2022; De Bernard et al. 2022; Loots et al., 2021; Virani, 2023) has indeed underlined the key role of private companies in cultural and creative ecosystems, especially in terms of arts development and cultural organization support. Indeed, private companies are considered integral components of the ecosystem of cultural and creative industries (CCIs), actively participating in the ecosystem activities and even working as levers for its development. The positive impact of private support or investment in arts and culture further underscores the private companies' importance in the ecosystem's development and their role of key agents within the broader entrepreneurial environment of CCIs.

As for the reflection related to CSR, recent scholarly discourse reflects a growing reconceptualization of cultural sponsorship and partnership within CSR frameworks, highlighting the shift from transactional sponsorships to more strategic and collaborative alliances. Traditional corporate sponsorships, often perceived as image-driven and promotional, are increasingly being replaced by partnerships rooted in shared values, long-term engagement, and mutual value creation (Axiotis, 2015; Wang & Holznagel, 2021). Partnerships between corporations, artists and cultural institutions, underscore the potential for relationship-building and resource integration that benefits both commercial and cultural actors (Lund & Greyser, 2015). This “co-creation” approach extends beyond brand visibility, fostering client interaction in culturally enriched contexts and supporting the global outreach of artists and arts organizations.

Furthermore, studies also indicate that younger audiences, particularly millennials, perceive partnerships as more authentic than conventional sponsorships, especially when credibility, value alignment, and sincerity are present (Wang & Holznagel, 2021). This insight highlights a reputational advantage for firms engaging in CSR through cultural collaboration. Finally, the institutional adaptation of cultural organizations to corporate approaches, including brand management and value co-creation, further blurs the boundaries between philanthropy and strategic CSR (Axiotis, 2015; Šain et al., 2019). This evolving dynamic encourages a more balanced power distribution, repositioning both cultural institutions and private companies as active agents in CSR-oriented partnerships.

Another emerging perspective related to CSR and culture reflects on the potential of these alliances in terms of sustainable development, also in the framework of the decade-long claim of the cultural and creative sector for the inclusion of culture in the sustainable development paradigm (Wiktor-Mach, 2020) either as fourth pillar of sustainable development (Sabatini, 2019), or as integrated in the social dimension of sustainability (Gerber, 2018; Wu, Fan, Chen, 2016) or as foundation of sustainable development itself (Soini and Dessein, 2016). In this context, cross-sector collaborations between private companies and cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are recognized as drivers of sustainable innovation and community resilience (Klein & Spsychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020; Loots et al., 2021), culture-led sustainable development, and cultural enhancement. With reference to sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems, the analysis focuses on how mutual learning and knowledge transfer between traditional sectors and culture could contribute to sustainable development (Saleh and Ost, 2023).

An interesting proposal in the context of the culture-corporate responsibility-sustainable development debate is the concept of CCR - Corporate Cultural Responsibility (Kohl, 2007), which emerged around twenty years ago mainly in the German-speaking context. The concept of Corporate Cultural Responsibility has progressively developed from a peripheral element of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to a formalized area of interest. It is now understood as a multifaceted and

context-sensitive responsibility wherein corporations engage with and contribute to the cultural dimensions of the societies in which they operate.

A foundational contribution to this field is offered by Maon and Lindgreen (2015), who argue that one crucial, but underexplored dimension of CSR is the cultural impact of corporate activities. They propose a typology of corporate engagement with culture — cultural destructiveness, cultural carelessness, and cultural prowess — each reflecting a progressively deeper understanding of cultural responsibility. Their work conceptualizes CCR as the set of voluntary corporate actions that preserve and promote cultural values and systems, positioning it as an ethical obligation aligned with stakeholder expectations and sustainability frameworks (Maon & Lindgreen, 2015).

This conceptual framework finds theoretical reinforcement in Becchetti, Solferino, and Tessitore's (2015) model, which addresses CCR in the context of global public goods, such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They argue that the cultural sector suffers from underinvestment due to free-riding behaviour, and posit that corporations—particularly those with strong community ties—can be instrumental in financing cultural preservation. The authors place CCR alongside state and international efforts to support the cultural commons, especially where public intervention is insufficient (Becchetti et al., 2015).

Kohl (2007) provides one of the earliest empirical studies on CCR, examining the cultural engagement of Austrian companies through art collections, employee cultural programs, and sponsorship. Her findings reveal that corporations increasingly consider it their responsibility to support culture, particularly as public funding diminishes. However, their role is largely complementary to, and not a replacement for, state-driven cultural policies (Kohl, 2007). Recently, regional and contextual dimensions of CCR have emerged as critical themes. In Ukraine, Humenná and Bediy (2022) highlight how CCR became a mechanism for national cultural resilience during the war with Russia. They argue that businesses can actively contribute to national identity and security through culturally responsible branding and support for indigenous culture, suggesting that CCR in this context extends beyond reputational strategy to civic duty (Humenná & Bediy, 2022). Likewise, Kugiel (2015) discusses CCR as a tool for international cultural diplomacy in the Polish context, illustrating CCR's potential as both a soft power instrument and a strategic marketing asset (Kugiel, 2015).

Sector-specific research by Martino and Scarcella Prandstraller (2018) on the Italian banking industry reveals that financial institutions have long utilized arts and cultural sponsorship to establish social legitimacy and foster stakeholder engagement. In an era of financial scandals and reputational crises, CCR serves not only as a reputational shield but as an expression of corporate citizenship rooted in regional identity and cultural continuity (Martino & Scarcella Prandstraller, 2018). Institutional developments have also supported CCR's rise. Jagielska (2020) examines the integration of CCR into corporate reporting practices in Poland, particularly in response to EU directives on non-financial

disclosures. She notes that cultural engagement, although often voluntary, is increasingly regarded as a legitimate component of CSR reporting, especially among larger firms. This institutionalization further legitimizes CCR within formal business governance (Jagielska, 2020). Finally, a broader normative perspective is provided by Eshtarian and Khaleghi Pour (2020), who propose a policy model for urban cultural governance grounded in CCR principles. Their study, focused on urban planning in Iran, calls for corporations to play an active role in cultural sustainability and intercultural dialogue. They emphasize CCR as a vital mechanism for harmonizing economic activity with local cultural identities and urban social cohesion (Eshtarian & Khaleghi Pour, 2020).

Collectively, the literature reveals a paradigm shift in the corporate role: from passive cultural benefactors to active participants in cultural sustainability and sustainable development. CCR is emerging as both an ethical and cultural imperative and a strategic asset, enabling businesses to foster cultural continuity, reinforce legitimacy, and engage meaningfully with the culture-led community development. The convergence of stakeholder theory, sustainability frameworks, and cultural ethics suggests that CCR will continue to evolve as a core dimension of corporate responsibility in the 21st century.

However, companies supporting culture still find difficulties in disclosing and communicating the impact these actions have in terms of sustainable development, especially when they are preparing official communication documents such as sustainability reports. Whereas the research on cultural indicators in sustainability reporting of cultural organizations has become a growing research trend (Cerquetti et al., 2023; Cerquetti & Montella, 2021; Esposito et al., 2019), the investigation on cultural indicators in sustainability reporting of non-CCIs private companies is still rather scarce (Borin, 2023; Associazione Civita, 2017 and 2022). The problem of suitable indicators has led companies either to attempt including culture into the social dimension indicators (for instance in relation to GRI standards or ESRS standards) or elaborating specific indicators, referring to consolidated international reporting frameworks (e.g. the IIRC - <IR> one) but independent and often tailored. Some companies (such as AdR – Aeroporti di Roma) have adapted the *UNESCO Culture 2030* Indicators to describe their action and impact on culture and sustainable development.

In general, however, there is still a need to carry out in-depth research on that topic, in order to have a richer and more granular understanding of this issue. This paper aims to address this research gap by presenting the preliminary work of the *Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility* of *Associazione Civita* in Italy, and describing the future steps it will take, leading a new approach to culture-related sustainability disclosures in private companies.

Research Design and Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative methodology approach, based on the case study of the *Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility* created by *Associazione Civita* in Italy. In 2025, the Committee resumed its activities under the coordination of AdR, and the scientific coordination of the Co-Director of *ObSARC – Observatory of Sustainability Accounting and Reporting Practices in Cultural and Creative Ecosystems* of Pegaso Digital University.

The qualitative approach was selected since it is the most appropriate to investigate in-depth complex and nascent research issues (Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina, 2006), while the case study of the *Committee* was selected based on criteria of relevance and representativeness (Patton, 2002) of the internal reflection on cultural support and sustainability reporting and communication.

The case was analysed through a preliminary document and desk analysis and in then through an empirical phase using action research methodology, since both the authors are involved in the works of the *Committee*. Action research is a participatory and iterative methodology that is based on the intervention of researchers in the activities observed, to identify problems, implement interventions, and reflect on outcomes in real-time contexts. It is widely used in education, healthcare, organizational, and business studies, where practitioners seek to improve their practices through systematic inquiry. The cyclical process—typically involving planning, participating, acting, observing, and reflecting—allows for continuous refinement of both theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Action research values contextual knowledge and practitioner expertise, often leading to transformative outcomes grounded in specific practice needs (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

This paper will reflect on the development of the analyses carried out within the committee and their work and reflection on culture-related actions as well as reporting and communicating practices, to offer insights into the main research questions. The results of this analysis will be presented and discussed in the following section, first providing an overview of the Committee genesis, aims and purpose, then illustrating the preliminary results of the analysis of cultural practices of the Committee members, as well as their priorities, issues and challenges in implementing, reporting and communicating their cultural actions inside their sustainability disclosures and strategies. The results then led the authors to draw some preliminary reflections on the potential of the works of the committee, also in terms of replicability of the model.

Research results: analysis of the context, implementation and measurement

As stated in the previous section, this paper aims at investigating the work of the Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility, implemented by *Associazione Civita* in the framework of its activities for promoting virtuous relationship between the worlds of culture and private companies. In

2017, in a study on non-financial reporting practices related to corporate engagement in culture, *Associazione Civita* reprised the term “Corporate Cultural Responsibility” to provide a theoretical background to CSR initiatives specifically focused on the cultural sector in Italy. A few years later, in 2022, the Association dedicated its 13th Report, titled “When Culture Meets Sustainability”, precisely to these practices, with the aim of highlighting their potential and identifying their critical issues (Valeri, 2022).

Building on this foundation, a proposal was developed to revisit these strategic issues for companies by delving deeper into the challenges related to impact assessment and communication of corporate-led cultural initiatives and the most effective methods for reporting them under international frameworks. The initiative also aims to highlight best practices and develop useful guidelines. Promoting these activities is the newly established “Corporate Cultural Responsibility” Committee, composed of a selection of member companies led by AdR, a large company that manages Rome’s airports and carries out related airport management activities, which is renowned for its culture-related initiatives. The Committee will carry out its work over a three-year period (2025–2027), under the scientific coordination of the Co-Director of the *ObSARC -Observatory on Sustainability Accounting and Reporting Practices in the Cultural and Creative Ecosystem* of Pegaso Digital University.

In line with its mission, the CCR Committee decided to operate along three parallel yet interconnected lines of action:

- Analysis and enhancement of ESG communication carried out by companies;
- Regulatory and fiscal aspects concerning corporate engagement in the cultural sector;
- Support for companies in measuring and reporting the impact of their cultural initiatives.

From a methodological standpoint, the project will rely on desk research supported by interviews and focus groups with representatives from the participating companies. This process will help identify and examine best practices, with a specific focus on non-financial disclosures and sustainability reports of corporate actors investing in culture, in order to define effective metrics and communication methods. It will also work on promoting a reflection on communication for cultural actions of private companies.

The ultimate outcome is to strengthen companies’ commitment to cultural investment, promoting a corporate culture that is socially impactful and enhancing the inclusive potential of culture, along with the ESG dynamics emerging from partnerships between the corporate world and non-profit organizations in the Third Sector. Specifically, one of the most relevant expected output is represented by a *Manifesto* aimed to promote the *Corporate Cultural Responsibility* concept, enhancing it to a national and international audience, raising awareness on the importance of cultural commitment in companies through a cross-sectoral ecosystem perspective, followed by a proposal of a set of indicators suitable for representing cultural actions and support of private companies.

The founding members of the Committee (described below in Table 1), represent various sectors of the Italian economic scenario, including the banking, transportation, energy, legal, technology and infrastructure sectors, thus providing a representative sample of the private companies composing the cultural support ecosystem.

Company name	Economic sector of activity	ESG strategy
AEROPORTI DI ROMA (Coordinator)	Transport & Infrastructure	Promoter of cultural and artistic enhancement projects at airport terminals, in partnership with artists and cultural institutions. Sustainability projects focusing on environmental (e.g. Net Zero), education (STEM workshops in collaboration with Boeing/First Scandinavia), and innovation (Innovation Hub, "Runway to the Future" accelerator), ESG supplier program. Strong commitment to local community and green tech.
A&A – Albè & Associati	Legal & Consulting	Law firm committed to culture and sustainability: partner of the MA*GA Museum, promoter of artistic projects aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda (Pistoletto). Certified UNI 11871 for sustainable law firm management. Provides ESG consulting services to companies, particularly for transformations into Benefit Corporations.
A2A	Energy & Utilities	Focused on the energy transition and circular economy through waste-to-energy recovery and the development of district heating. Through the AEM Foundation, it promotes technical-scientific education and the enhancement of industrial heritage. Actively engaged in corporate volunteering and support for local communities, it invests in open innovation via a CVC fund (360 Life) and startup platforms. Collaborates with public administrations and universities, and is a member of Utilitalia CSR.
BANCA DEL FUCINO	Finance & Credit	Strong local roots: support for culture (theatres, festivals, social cinema), inclusive sports, and health (Bambino Gesù Foundation). CSR focused on local communities, education, and social

		cohesion. Support for local startups and innovation awards in Southern Italy.
BPER BANCA	Finance & Credit	Target Net Zero platform for SMEs, Gruppo Abele Foundation initiative for at-risk youth (Present4Future). Culture (collections and exhibitions), crowdfunding donations, financial education. Strong local engagement and open innovation for the green and social transition.
EDISON	Energy & Utilities	Strongly integrated ESG strategy: emissions reduction, renewable energy, circular economy (waste heat recovery). The EOS Foundation focuses on education, inclusion, and culture. Examples include projects for sustainable cinema and music, green museums, and energy communities. Actively engaged in territorial co-design, it promotes innovation through awards, calls for proposals, and partnerships with universities and incubators.
FERROVIE DELLO STATO ITALIANE	Transportation & Infrastructure	Net Zero 2030 plan, electrified stations, environmental investments, and urban regeneration. Help Centers and hospitality services in stations, educational projects, and support for marginalized groups. Open innovation through hackathons, startup and university platforms (InnoStation). Stakeholder engagement projects with the Third Sector across local communities.
INWIT	Telecommunications & ICT	As a mobile tower operator, it focuses on infrastructure sustainability: energy-efficient towers, use of renewable energy, and eco-design. CSR commitment through donations and corporate volunteering at the local level (local restorations and social support). In open innovation, it experiments with IoT solutions for “smart” antennas and smart cities, collaborating with startups and universities on the Internet of Things and environmental monitoring (e.g., tower-mounted air quality systems and wireless sensing).
ISTITUTO PER IL CREDITO SPORTIVO E CULTURALE	Finance & Credit	The Institute integrates sustainability into its operating model through an ESG strategy based on ex-ante assessments of environmental, social, and governance impact (ESG + SROI) for each

		financing initiative. It has established dedicated ESG governance, publishes voluntary reports according to international standards (GRI, aligned with the CSRD), and issues Social Bonds to finance high social impact sports and cultural projects. Sustainability is fully embedded in decision-making processes, pricing, and risk management.
MAIRE	Industry & Technology	Engineering group for the energy transition. A member of the UN Global Compact, it promotes green technologies (hydrogen, circular economy for plastics). The MAIRE Foundation supports culture, education, and the development of “humanist engineers.” Strong commitment to gender equality, safety, and industrial innovation.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANIES PARTICIPATING IN CIVITA'S CCR COMMITTEE. Source: Author's own elaboration.

First result of the empirical research: type of investment and support to culture provided by the committee's companies

As illustrated in the Research Design and Methodology section, the works of the Committee started in July 2025, when a strategic meeting was carried out to preliminarily understand the types of investment and cultural support implemented by the companies of the CCR Committee and its potential development. This analysis was complemented by a questionnaire, that will be described in section b. The data collected during this first meeting completed preliminary desk research on the same topic, which led to the proposal of a taxonomy that could serve as a basis for theoretical reflection and practice-oriented actions.

This taxonomy exemplifies the main types of actions and support that companies provide to culture, as described here below:

Support for museums, cultural and artistic organizations, and third sector entities, primarily in the form of main sponsorships, partnerships, or donations; creation of corporate foundations.

Initiatives in support of local communities (e.g., villages and inner areas) and social inclusion.

Local development projects, culture-led territorial regeneration, and infrastructure interventions (energy or technology-related), often through technical sponsorships.

Awareness-raising and educational activities, particularly focused on scientific and technological culture and on engaging specific targets (e.g., youth) around sustainability topics, including the establishment of awards.

Organization of cultural events, such as festivals, exhibitions, conferences, and talks.

Cultural, training, or awareness initiatives targeting employees

Financial and legal services for culture-specific activities

Results of the preliminary questionnaire

In the current context, the ability to effectively communicate corporate cultural initiatives and measure their impact has become strategically important. However, companies often face significant challenges: from the difficulty of collecting meaningful data, to the lack of shared evaluation tools, and the fragmentation of external messaging. Bearing this in mind and to trigger the discussion on these topics, during the first meeting of the Committee a questionnaire was also launched (completed by the companies autonomously in the following days) to gather insights from the companies participating in the Committee. The participants showed a substantial alignment in relation to the motives and importance attributed to these activities as well as shared challenges. The paragraphs here below provide an overview of the results of the preliminary investigation in relation to the three main research questions included in the questionnaire.

The first question explored the main obstacles to the effective communication of cultural initiatives/support for culture. The aggregated answers indicate that the most common problem is related to the difficulty in measuring and conveying cultural impact, followed by the lack of standardized indicators and the poor integration with corporate strategy (see figure 1 here below).

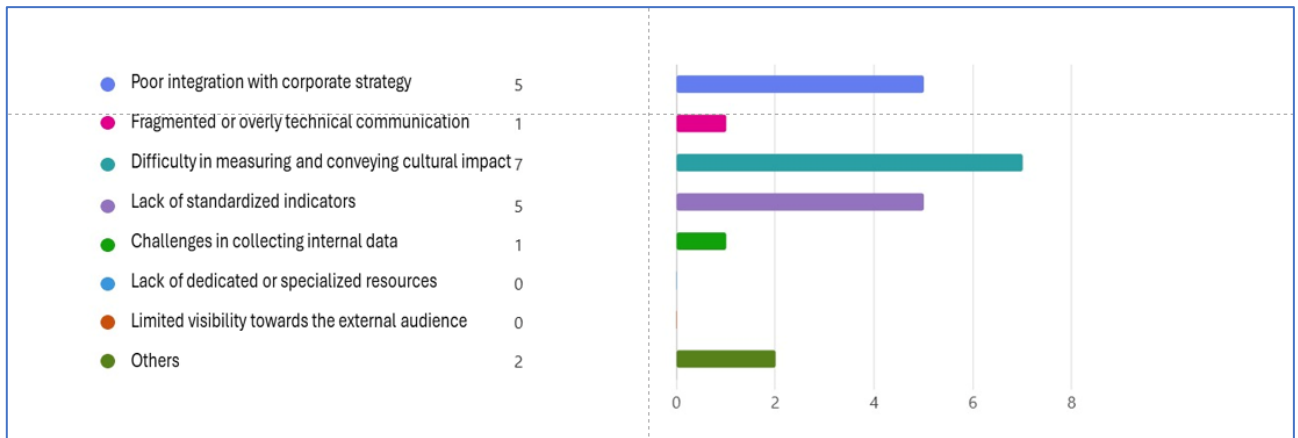


FIGURE 1. MAIN OBSTACLES TO THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF CULTURAL INITIATIVES/SUPPORT FOR CULTURE (INCLUDING IN RELATION TO THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORKS USED). Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the second question participants were asked to indicate the importance attributed to different potential objectives of corporate cultural activity or corporate support for culture (figure 2). In this case, the responses highlighted that the purposes of corporate cultural activities and cultural support are mainly the creation of local value with and for communities, but also building alliances with cultural institutions, creating and measuring impact. Marketing objectives (communication, brand positioning, and reputation) are also relevant, although to a lower degree. It is noteworthy that some companies perceive cultural engagement also as a means for innovating formats and channels of intervention.



FIGURE 2. - PRIORITY OF ASPECTS RELATED TO CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OR CULTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE COMPANY. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The topic of data collection and data availability was addressed in the last question. From the results, it emerged that all the companies of the sample are implementing monitoring activities, the most frequent ones related to quantitative data on budget and financial investment in culture, cultural events/projects, and audience. Qualitative data are less frequently collected, as well as data on communication indicators (e.g. related to visibility and engagement).

Figure 1 - Type of available data related to CCR actions

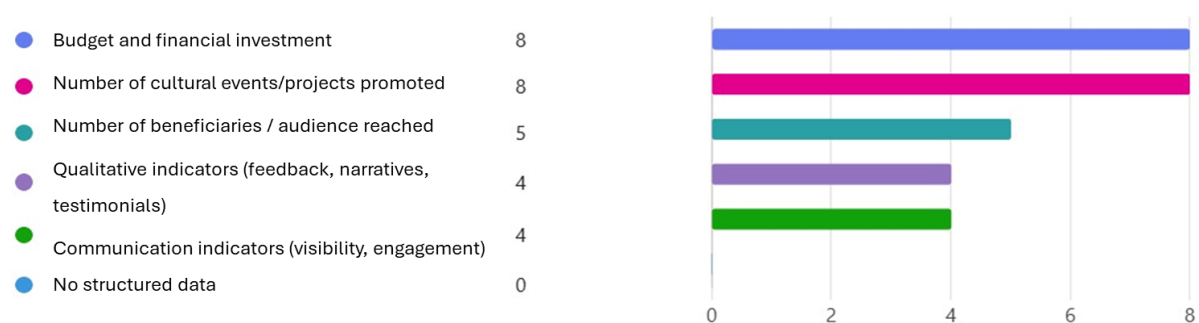


FIGURE 3. - TYPE OF AVAILABLE DATA RELATED TO CCR ACTIONS. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Concluding remarks

This study has explored the evolving landscape of Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR) within sustainability strategies of private companies, with particular attention to the Italian context through the work of the *Committee on Corporate Cultural Responsibility* launched by *Associazione Civita* and coordinated by *Aeroporti di Roma S.p.A.*. The findings provide important insights into the integration of cultural initiatives into broader company strategies frameworks, revealing a growing strategic alignment between cultural engagement and corporate sustainability agendas (RQ1). The results highlighted the multifaceted nature of companies' commitment to culture and could be interpreted as indicators of the recognition of culture as a vehicle for stakeholder engagement, local development, and reputational value, often linking their cultural investments to environmental and social commitments.

However, significant barriers remain. The study highlights that the principal challenges lie in the absence of standardized indicators, limited internal capabilities to measure intangible

outcomes, and insufficient integration of cultural actions into mainstream strategic and reporting frameworks (RQ2). Despite growing interest, most companies still rely on quantitative proxies—such as event numbers or audience size—while qualitative impacts on identity, inclusion, and community cohesion apparently remain underrepresented or vaguely articulated.

As for the potential of standardized or context-sensitive indicators (RQ3), the research highlights the need for further investigations, probably leading to hybrid approaches that balance comparability with flexibility and narrative richness.

In conclusion, the research underscores the necessity for more robust evaluative tools, cross-sectoral learning, and support to elevate the visibility and legitimacy of CCR. The ongoing work of the CCR Committee represents a foundational step toward a more coherent, transparent, and impactful model of cultural disclosure in sustainability reporting and communication. Their forthcoming launch of a *Manifesto for Corporate Cultural Responsibility* is expected to significantly advance the international discourse across scientific, policy, and practice domains related to this topic. Future research should further support this paradigmatic shift by refining measurement frameworks and systematically exploring the longitudinal impacts of corporate engagement in cultural sustainability, particularly from an international comparative perspective

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Understanding the full value of culture: Theory into policy

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ABSTRACT

While a large body of research has identified immense non-monetisable value in cultural activities, the economic benefits of cultural activities remain the predominant focus of cultural policy. This paper argues that this is in large part because the cultural sector does not yet have the tools to articulate and incorporate the qualitative nature of “intrinsic” cultural values into economic decision-making processes. Reviewing a thematic analysis of extant literature that identified an ecology of the values of cultural activity across seven domains: aesthetic, educational, financial, personal, sociocultural, technical, and wellbeing, it adds environment as an eighth domain and presents two tools that can be used to holistically identify the qualitative and quantitative values inherent in cultural activities, and to bring these values to the policy table.

Keywords:

Cultural value,
Cultural policy,
Policy discourse,
Cultural value
domains, Cultural
policy tools

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Patrycja Kaszynska for her support and the CHC Taxonomies team for their inspiration and critical engagement.

Introduction

According to the UK's *Creative Industries Sector Plan*, "The sector already acts as a dynamic growth engine for our economy across the UK's nations and regions, contributing 2.4 million jobs and £124 billion GVA to the economy, generating knowledge spillovers that drive innovation and activity across the economy. The government sees the high-growth value of the Creative Industries now and for the decades to come" (Nandy, 2025: 4). But also, "For too long, however, the sector has not been given the recognition it deserves and the backing it requires (...) We will work across government and industry to tackle misperceptions of the sector's value." (2025: 5). And yet the Sector Plan continues to express the value of film, literature, and other forms of culture only in economic terms: investment, jobs, and GVA, that drive innovation, with a focus on "our highest potential sub-sectors" (2025: 9).

The EU's Cultural Compass project recognizes the "limited consistency" of existing cultural "documents and tools" (European Commission, 2025: 2) and promises to take a more balanced approach by emphasizing "culture's positive impact on society, the economy, and international relations" (2025: 1). It seeks "an overarching strategic framework to guide and harness the multiple dimensions of culture", which aims at "embedding culture more visibly in the EU's overarching policy goals, ensuring it becomes more accessible for all and positioning it as a driver of democracy, security, competitiveness, innovation, societal resilience and international partnerships". Nonetheless, Creative Europe, "the only EU programme specifically dedicated to transnational cultural cooperation" (Culture Action Europe, 2023), is facing restructure and a budget cut of €40 million.

An extensive body of literature exists around the value of arts, culture and heritage across many academic disciplines including literary and cultural theory, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, and cultural economics (see summaries in Hutter and Throsby, 2008; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016) that has identified an enormous diversity of benefits from tangible and intangible culture. Thus, the challenge for people who take a more inclusive view of the value of culture is to bridge this discourse gap and present a holistic view of the value(s) of culture to policy makers that highlights the full range of impacts of cultural activity on "society, the economy, and international relations".

Given the enormous range of cultural activities and values discussed in the literature mentioned above, the most useful definition of culture for this purpose is the broadest one, adopted by the United Nations in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: "(...) culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, and

(...) encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UN, 2001, p1).

This definition necessarily includes – alongside the arts, galleries, libraries, and museums, which are most commonly included in the definition of “culture” – sport, hospitality, fashion, religion, architecture, education, and a range of other human artefacts, practices, and heritage that constitute features of past and present human cultures and sub-cultures. It encourages the integration of all culture into a coherent discourse, and consequently this paper argues that having certain forms of culture “radically divested” (O’Connor, 2024: 5) from others invites the continuation of policy silos. It views culture as a “public good” (Meyrick and Barnett, 2020) and includes everyday cultural practices (Wright, 2022) as being co-dependent with “high” culture (Kaszynska, 2024). Importantly, Kaszynska (2024) notes that the term “value of culture” should be distinguished from the broader term “cultural value”. This paper will refer to “the value of culture” in its broadest sense unless it refers to cultural value specifically.

This paper builds on the findings of a thematic analysis of literature that identified seven domains of value in cultural activities (Brown, 2025) and provides a holistic framework for identifying many quantitative and qualitative values of cultural activity. It proceeds by providing a brief history of the topic, then outlining the revised framework’s eight domains. It proposes some emergent tools that might be used to express those values in terms to which policy makers might be receptive and concludes by arguing for further research to validate the domains and bridge the discourse gap.

A brief history of this issue

The value of what is now known as culture has been debated since at least Aristotle and Confucius (Brown, 2005; Holden and Balta, 2012; Brown, 2022). However, no framework has yet proven sufficiently robust to solve the problem of capturing the full value of culture in a policy context, however defined (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). Cultural values evolve, affected by time, knowledge, context, cultural background, economic factors, taste, ideas, and more (Lewens, 2015). Nonetheless, concepts of value appear in most of the legal and policy instruments that shape arts, culture and heritage practices (for example, see DCMS, 2015; Historic England, 2015; Council of Europe, 2005). Recently, First Nations scholars have introduced new ways of knowing and new perspectives to cultural policy (Althaus, 2020; Manero et al, 2022).

Discourse concerning the values of culture remained the domain of philosophers, artists, and writers for thousands of years until Adorno and Horkheimer coined the term “culture industry” to critique what they viewed as a corruption of the real value of culture (Adorno & Bernstein, 1991 p106). Despite these and other critiques, the “absorption of the cultural sector into neoliberal policymaking, and its integration into the economic imaginary of the knowledge economy” (O’Connor, 2024: 26) resulted in

a disregard for non-economic values of culture. This has primarily revolved around “creative industries”, “creative economy” and “creative class” discourses in the Anglosphere since the late 1990s (de Bernard et al, 2022: 335), resulting in a bias that neglects non-urban, nonwestern locations in debates about the values of culture; unavoidably including the research that underpins this paper.

In the 21st century, systematic approaches to assessing the non-economic values of culture have recognised “intrinsic” values of cultural outputs, practices, and capital, which cannot be easily (if all) measured (Throsby, 2001). Throsby’s definition of “cultural capital”, which should be distinguished from Bourdieu’s use of the term (Haines & Lötter, 2022), distinguishes culture’s aesthetic, spiritual, social, historic, symbolic, and authenticity properties from the “economic value” of commodified culture. Holden (2004, 2006) argued that the over-emphasis in public policy on “instrumental” value emphasised easily measured outcomes to the detriment of intrinsic and institutional values, which represent the greater part of the value of culture. O’Brien (2010) also acknowledged the inherent difficulties in measuring culture’s worth beyond purely economic terms, arguing for a more nuanced approach to valuation because the “intrinsic/instrumental division” was too imprecise to be useful.

A more nuanced view proposed culture as an “ecology” or “ecosystem” (Holden, 2015; de Bernard et al, 2022: 339-343); a metaphor that has found growing influence in research and policy, albeit with some inconsistency in its framing language (Kaszynska et al, 2022). It underpins the approach preferred by the UK government’s Cultural and Heritage Capitals project (Sagger & Bezzano, 2024) and is recognised in the *Creative Industries Sector Plan* (Nandy, 2025: 8). An ecological approach has been found to be better suited than previous models to understanding non-Western concepts and practices of culture (Liu, 2016; Watene and Yap, 2015). Gross and Wilson (2019) specify that their use of ecological language aims to explore the *interconnections* between the profit-making creative industries, the publicly funded arts, and everyday creativity, which requires encompassing the mundane and normative alongside the industrial and innovative. An ecological view also allows assessment of the values of culture over inter-generational timeframes, exposing their influence on issues such as social cohesion and entrenched poverty, or as a contributor to the Sustainable Development Goals (Zheng et al, 2021; Sabatini, 2019). However, ecological metaphors have limits (Lewens, 2015), since their fundamental cultural units, or “memes” are not easily identifiable or quantifiable. Further, humans play an active role, mediated by language and technology and therefore difficult to trace, in the evolution of their cultures. This complexity requires new mathematical modelling before a reasonable understanding can be claimed (Moss 2016).

Klamer (2017) identified environmental degradation, social inequality, and a loss of meaning and purpose among individuals and communities as specific problems that derive from economic policy fixations on quantitative measures like GDP and profit. He proposed a “value-based” approach that emphasises the intrinsic value of non-economic goods such as families, communities, knowledge, and art. This requires a critique of the evaluation process (O’Brien 2015); who does the valuing and

how they do it – and thus who and what is excluded – are critical aspects of any valid assessment. This perspectivist view (Smith, 2022) recognises the subjective and political nature of the values of culture; contrasting an individual's response to an artwork with the community identity and cohesion derived from sharing that experience (Brown 2006). Brown argued that “repeat experiences lead to higher-order benefits” that produce measurable effects, inviting the possibility of evaluating culture via “spillovers” (Bina et al, 2012) or “externalities” (Bille, 2024) such as increased tourism, urban development, and increased productivity through education and wellbeing (ACE, 2015). These forms of cultural impact appear, for example, in the UK Department of Culture Media, and Sport's valuation of the health and wellbeing impacts of culture and heritage (Frontier Economics, 2024), though this report is limited to the arts, excludes qualitative data, and focuses on a limited range of externalities.

Trembath and Fielding identified 12 domains of cultural and creative activity that “contribute to Australia's GDP, even when that contribution is numerically small” (2020, p11). They argued that poor data collection and management inhibited evaluations of Australia's cultural sector, and explored seven qualitative “transformative Impacts” of culture (Fielding and Trembath, 2019, p5). The Centre for Cultural Value tried to bring some degree of harmony to this chaos via their co-created evaluation principles (CCV, 2021), which encompass the politically unpopular notion that failure is an unavoidable outcome of innovation that can produce valuable learnings for the cultural sector (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023).

Research into the many qualitative and non-monetisable values of culture has tended to dig selectively into identifiable values of specific cultural practices without seeking to link these values into a holistic framework for appraising multiple values inherent in culture that can be reported as benefits from cultural projects, programmes, and organisations. An analysis of these disparate studies (Brown 2025) identified the original set of seven domains proposed below.

Alternative approaches to the focus on culture as an economic force have emerged from anthropology, sociology, behavioural economics, organisational and management studies (eg De Cunzio and Roeber, 2022; Maurer, 2006). Hoftstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, for example, analyses the difference in culture across countries and the way business is done through a series of binary concepts or indexes (Nickerson, 2023). However, these studies tend to take a different view of “culture” and thus a divergent appreciation of the value of culture from that of studies concerned with creativity and cultural *practice* (for a deeper critique, see Taras et al, 2009). It is beyond the scope of this paper to encompass this literature.

The result of this enduring inability to adequately define the values of culture has been that an “insufficiency of quantitative evidence, as well as the fragmentation of culture related data, produced by different institutions, have tended to marginalize culture in national and local development strategies and policies as well as within the identified United Nations Sustainable Development

Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) areas for funding” (UNESCO 2025). The response has been to seek “more reliable measurement systems” and more data “to provide a better understanding of the multiple ways culture contributes to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development” across “the role of culture as a sector of activity, as well as the transversal contribution of culture across different SDGs and policy areas”. Suites of indicators such as the Culture|2030 Indicators (UNESCO, 2019), the Centre for Cultural Value’s Vitality Indicators (CCV, 2025) or the Takso framework (CDN, 2025) might be used to identify specific examples and/or measures of value within each domain to provide “a reliable method to assess impact across a range of public policy areas.”

However, this paper argues that without a firm theoretical foundation for understanding complex interplay between the full range of qualitative as well as quantitative activities and values of culture, the pursuit of better management and more data will only continue the “limited consistency” across policy documents and will fail to adequately encompass the intrinsic or qualitative benefits of culture. It next proposes a framework that suggests a useful theoretical foundation.

Eight domains of cultural value

The following list of domains is expanded from the seven originally proposed and explored in Brown (2022) and justified in Brown (2025). Those domains derived from an extensive – but far from comprehensive – inductive thematic analysis of available literature. This analysis focused on the value in cultural *activities*; asking *why* those activities happened and categorising values based on the motivations or expected outcomes of the creators and/or participants. The domain originally identified as “Wellbeing” has been amended to the narrower domain of “Health” because research aiming to validate the domains (publication forthcoming) identified that, in the views of cultural practitioners, “wellbeing” comprises an overarching purpose for cultural activity across these domains, whereas the impact of cultural activity on health (broadly defined) is a specific domain at individual and collective levels that has its own body of literature (see Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Similarly, although it was not identified in the original research, “Environment” was identified in the validation research as a significant domain and hence is explored in more detail than the others below.

These domains are not mutually exclusive. They form an ecology of values whose practices and manifestations differ between individuals, cultures, and sub-cultural groups, and have evolved over time, consistent with Brown’s (2006) view, Holden’s (2015) metaphor, and Lewens’s (2015) observations. The values that they describe can be positive or negative – for example, Socio-political value can lead to agreement or to conflict. Sub-categories of these domains were identified in the original research, though more work is needed to produce a workable taxonomy based on them –

particularly one that includes non-Western cultures. Each domain has been studied on its own by diverse researchers and has its own body of literature. The domains are briefly described as follows.

Aesthetic - People participate in culture because it's attractive – or not.

The aesthetic appeal of high art has been well studied but this domain also includes everyday aesthetics such as sub-cultural identity codes, political imagery, and other encoded cultural communication. It thus overlaps with the education and socio-political domains, and can create attraction or repulsion.

Educational - People participate in culture to learn and to teach.

This domain covers both teaching and research – neither of which must be deliberate. It includes individual and mass education, including practices of indoctrination and misinformation, both of which can produce positive or negative outcomes.

Environmental - People participate in culture to change their physical world.

The rise in ecological thinking about the cultural and creative sectors has in part been driven by the increasingly urgent need to support, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals. A growing literature explores cultural activities that focus on planetary care, and the Culture 2030 Indicators (UNESCO, 2019) attempt to provide a coherent system for mapping such activities and their progress. Combining this metaphor with the ecological view of culture, it seems appropriate to view culture as the oxygen that permeates and supports policies of all kinds, and users of this framework may adopt such Indicators to add depth and detail to the domains.

At a more mundane level, this domain encompasses cultural activities that, for example, decorate an urban setting, or build new facilities for religious observance. Each of these contributes to the environment of those involved in the activity and those with whom they share the space. This domain can also produce positive or negative value, as people from other cultures may resent the changes; and cultural activities can be environmentally destructive while producing social or personal benefits.

Financial - People participate in culture to make money.

The pursuit of a living is one perfectly acceptable reason for cultural practice. Even non-profit cultural activities need to be funded, and some are regularly derided as a waste of money. Participating in cultural activities costs money and many activities are organised in the hope of raising money for some purpose.

Health - People participate in culture to make themselves better.

Cultural activity is increasingly recognised as a driver of specific individual, social, and global health outcomes. The World Health Organisation commissioned a report into the social determinants of health (Organization et al, 2008), an area of research that has begun to explore the role of culture.

Personal - People participate in culture to feel ... something.

Catharsis, comprehension, identity, ecstasy, turmoil, achievement, development, and more result from cultural activities. Although this domain is called personal, it is not necessarily individual; this value accrues to groups that share, for example, sacred symbols or rituals, or icons of identity such as flags and anthems.

Socio-political - People participate in culture to understand and/or change their place in the world.

This domain encompasses social cohesion, tolerance and diversity, political discourse, and more. Relevant cultural activities include journalism, satire, public fora, and others. They can be normative or transformative at individual or social levels, and result in harmony or conflict.

Technical - People participate in culture to try out new techniques or technologies.

Technical value encompasses cultural activity requiring or inspiring technological innovation as well as the technical skill required of cultural practitioners as individuals and in ensembles. A complex interaction between these two emerges when development of a creative technique becomes experimentation that becomes innovation.

With the exception of the Financial domain, each of these can be assessed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. However, some of the value in many domains cannot be measured directly – it must be evaluated using externalities such as crowd sizes for aesthetic value, educational outcomes, or crime rates for socio-political value (Bille, 2024). Similarly, useful proxy measures might be found in the suites of Indicators discussed above.

Policy tools that arise from this framework

Firstly, this framework itself aims to help promote the holistic benefits of cultural activities to policy makers at the highest level by enabling a systematic and holistic appreciation. Whenever discussions arise concerning the importance of culture in general or the prospects for a specific cultural activity such as World Expos or the Olympics, this framework can be deployed to analyse the complete set of values – positive or negative, qualitative and quantitative – that are evidenced in that activity. It can further be applied to component activities of large-scale events; each one examined from multiple perspectives to evaluate its impact on local communities, sub-cultures, or even individuals. This should steer public discourses beyond purely economic impacts, and to instead enable discussion that is inclusive of the full range of effects of proposed cultural activity, and thereby to justify cultural

policy investment with a clearer holistic picture of the long-term benefits or disbenefits of policy decisions.

Secondly, at an operational level this framework can be used to evaluate specific projects and review the impact of funding decisions. It could replace or augment the notoriously vague, but widely used under various aliases, “artistic merit” criterion (Lewandowska, 2023) via a statement of how important each domain is to a project funder. For example, a call for arts funding might specify a set of domain preferences that the funding body seeks from applicants, as shown in the blue line in Figure 1, which reflects an intention for applicants to produce educational materials concerning a politically sensitive topic that must be financially self-sustaining.

An expert panel might assess an application as shown in the red line and decide that the one shown is fundable despite the discrepancies. As part of acquitting the project, the final outcome(s) might be evaluated as shown by the black line. This provides funding bodies with a significant dataset that can be used to demonstrate and track value for money across all domains, thereby responding to the call for better data from UNESCO (2025) and improving on the “limited consistency” that the Cultural Compass seeks to address (European Commission, 2025). Issues concerning the perspectivist problem are resolved by aligning the project with the funding body’s objectives – i.e. the value is assessed as it accrues to the funding body or its specified stakeholder(s).

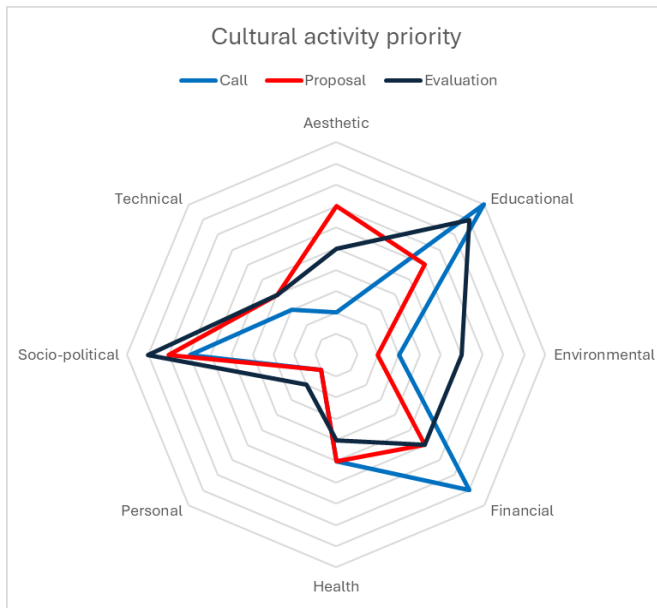


FIGURE 1. PROJECT EVALUATION SCHEMA USING THE 8 DOMAINS.

Source: Author’s own elaboration

This approach requires all stakeholders to consider the full range of project values from multiple perspectives. It also encourages evaluation of qualitative and intrinsic values as well as financial concerns, providing a better account of the kind of social and other benefits sought by the European Commission (2025). To effectively capture sentiment regarding intrinsic forms of value, evaluations need not be *scored* by the expert panel. As shown in Figure 2, they might use qualitative instruments that can be easily converted into scores, such as a sliding scale or a Likert scale.



FIGURE 2. QUALITATIVE EVALUATION METHOD TO BE USED ACROSS THE 8 DOMAINS.

Source: Author's own elaboration

Conclusion

This paper has presented a theoretical framework that describes eight domains of cultural value; qualitative and quantitative. It has proposed two tools that might be used to give cultural policy makers a holistic view of the inherent values of cultural activity. This in turn allows a more structured and complete collection of data concerning cultural activities and programmes, responding to calls from international policy-making bodies.

However, incorporating other perspectives may or may not change the framework substantively. Although this version is presented as a workable draft, a great deal more research is needed to validate it and explore its usefulness.

The details of each domain remain unclear, particularly with regard to the enormous diversity of human cultural activity. Further case studies and mapping are needed to explore and test this.

It is not clear whether this framework applies to a broader set of cultural activities than the one from which it has been derived. Examination of non-Western cultural activities, including First Nations knowledges and values, is essential to clarify and complete the set of domains.

These domains comprise the beginning of a way to understand the full values of cultural activity. The relationships within and between cultural ecologies require extended research aimed at a complete theory of the value of culture. Several systems of cultural Indicators might prove useful in identifying factors that define the domains and trace relationships between them. This will require widespread and sustained effort.

Finally, one stated aim of this ENCATC congress is to contribute to MONDIACULT 2025. Accordingly, the above framework is proposed to specifically contribute to the following MODIACULT objectives by providing a holistic framework for a shared understanding of the role of culture in human activities:

Strengthen multilateral action, collaboration, and solidarity among countries to shape the global cultural agenda.

Foster an inclusive and participatory dialogue on cultural policies by engaging a wide range of stakeholders.

Support Member States in strengthening cultural information systems to inform evidence-based public policies.

With these in mind, this paper seeks to help restore culture to its rightful place as the oxygen that sustains the policy ecosystem.

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Examining the Socio-Spatial Effects of Decentralised Cultural Events in Vienna

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Kultursommer Wien, a municipally funded cultural festival that distributes free performances across Vienna's public spaces, as a case study in decentralised cultural policy. Drawing on ethnographic and mixed-methods fieldwork conducted over two consecutive editions, it explores how such initiatives may address socio-spatial inequalities in cultural access. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of cultural democracy and spatial justice, focusing on three festival venues embedded in distinct urban contexts. Findings suggest that decentralisation can reduce structural barriers by bringing cultural offerings closer to under-served communities. However, inclusion remains contingent on spatial norms, communication strategies, and design choices that affect whether individuals feel welcome and entitled to stay. While decentralised formats hold potential for fostering more inclusive cultural participation, they may also reproduce inequalities in new ways if not attuned to local dynamics. The paper contributes to ongoing debates on equity in cultural governance and the spatial implications of decentralised provision..

Keywords:

Cultural
democracy

Spatial justice

Decentralisation

Cultural Policy

Vienna

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper builds on research conducted in 2024 as part of the study Kulturfestivals im Stadtteil, commissioned by the Cultural Department of the City of Vienna. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the City of Vienna for supporting this research, and to the Kultursommer Wien organisational team, as well as the stage and security staff at Reithofferpark, Großfeldsiedlung, and Schrödingerplatz. We are also grateful to all respondents and local stakeholders who generously shared their time and perspectives during fieldwork.

The authors wish to thank the full research team with whom this work was carried out. In particular, we are grateful to Mark Scherner and Daniele Karasz for their central role in shaping the study's design and direction, and to Anna Ban and Larissa Mannheim for their valuable contributions to fieldwork and analysis.

Introduction

Since its inception in 2020, *Kultursommer Wien* (literally translated as *Vienna's Summer of Culture*) has taken place annually across Vienna as a free, open-air cultural festival initiated by the city administration. Organised in response to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival was designed both to support freelance artists and to offer cultural experiences to residents during a period of mobility restrictions (Gemeinde Wien, 2021). Rather than relying on central institutions, the festival distributed performances across parks and neighbourhood venues throughout the city. Over the following years, this decentralised structure was retained and expanded. By 2023, *Kultursommer Wien* had featured over 1,000 performances by 2,000 artists, engaging tens of thousands of visitors and extending its presence into peripheral districts (Kultursommer Wien, 2023). In December 2024, the City of Vienna reaffirmed its commitment to the festival by approving €4 million in public funding for its 2025 edition (Gemeinderat Wien, 2024). This places Kultursommer among the highest-funded cultural initiatives in the city, alongside institutions such as the KunstHausWien and the Zoom Kindermuseum.

Despite its informal spatial setting, Kultursommer is a municipally coordinated and publicly financed event, embedded in the city's broader cultural strategy and budgetary planning. This spatially decentralised programming model emerges against the backdrop of a cultural infrastructure that remains strongly concentrated in Vienna's central districts. While the city allocated €215.6 million to

cultural initiatives in 2018, the bulk of this investment has historically supported flagship institutions such as the Vienna State Opera and the MuseumsQuartier (Rohn, 2020). This centralisation reflects long-standing Austrian traditions in cultural policy (Mokre, 2004), and continues to shape access across the city's varied demographic landscape. Outer districts—often more socially and linguistically diverse—tend to receive less structural investment in culture.

This paper examines *Kultursommer Wien* as a case study to explore how decentralised cultural events interact with urban inequality. Specifically, it asks how such initiatives enhance access for residents typically underrepresented in institutionalised culture, and to what extent they reshape socio-spatial dynamics through everyday public spaces. To address this, the paper draws on the concept of cultural democracy (Bennett, 2001), which foregrounds plural participation and locally grounded frameworks, and spatial justice (Soja, 2010), which emphasises the right to equitable spatial practices beyond institutional boundaries. The findings suggest that *Kultursommer Wien* lowers structural barriers by offering free performances in familiar public spaces, increasing proximity to under-served communities. Yet proximity alone does not guarantee inclusion, as spatial norms, communicative practices, and design choices shape whether visitors feel addressed, safe, and entitled to stay.

The paper outlines the mixed-methods approach, analyses findings from three *Kultursommer Wien* venues in distinct socio-spatial contexts, and reflects on implications for decentralised and spatially responsive cultural policy.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of cultural democracy, introduced by Tony Bennett (2001), challenges traditional frameworks that define cultural participation merely as access to officially sanctioned institutions. Instead, it emphasises the entitlement of all individuals and communities to shape cultural life on their own terms. Cultural democracy acknowledges intersecting forms of exclusion—rooted in class, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexuality—and asserts that genuine participation must include the right to preserve one's identity rather than conform to dominant norms. Realising this vision requires responsive, inclusive cultural frameworks that are sensitive to local contexts and plural experiences. As Bennett (2001: 67) argues, this vision demands “the creation of local, regional, municipal, and community structures and strategies for the development and implementation of cultural policies committed to the pursuit of cultural diversity objectives.” Cultural democracy, in this view, is as much about infrastructural transformation as it is about representational inclusion.

This framework has gained traction in response to the limitations of traditional, centralised models of cultural provision. Scholars such as Bianchini (1993) and Rohn (2020) have shown how conventional cultural policy frequently reproduces spatial and social inequalities—concentrating resources in city centres and reinforcing narrow definitions of cultural value. Peripheral areas, low-income communities, and migrant populations are often overlooked—not necessarily by design, but due to institutional inertia and historically uneven development. These limitations have prompted growing interest in place-based approaches, particularly decentralisation, which is often framed as a strategy to redistribute authority and enhance local responsiveness.

Yet its growing appeal also raises critical questions about how power, participation, and access are actually reconfigured in practice. As Bodó et al. (2021) argue, decentralisation refers to “network architectures” and “organisational arrangements in which control, authority, and connectivity are spread across multiple nodes or actors, rather than being concentrated in a single central point,” while also cautioning that it may paradoxically “produce centralising effects” (ibid: 13). In theory, decentralised governance aims to bring decision-making closer to citizens; in practice, however, as Hooghe and Marks (2001) observe, it is often shaped by enduring forms of top-down control. This tension is especially relevant in initiatives such as Kultursommer Wien, which are decentralised in format but remain centrally coordinated and financed.

In the cultural sphere, decentralisation is frequently viewed as a response to the kinds of exclusion Bennett addresses. As noted above, cultural democracy calls for the development of policy infrastructures at municipal and community levels. Yet scholars such as Mould (2018) and Brook et al. (2020) point out that these ambitions often fall short in practice. Cultural participation tends to remain dominated by privileged groups, while low-income and marginalised ethnic communities continue to be underrepresented. Moreover, when decentralisation is implemented through ‘creative city’ strategies, it can inadvertently reinforce cycles of gentrification and displacement rather than disrupt them.

To address these limitations, Edward Soja’s (2010) concept of spatial justice provides a complementary and necessary lens. Soja emphasises the lived dimension of urban space and the unequal distribution of opportunities to use, inhabit, and shape it. Rather than relying solely on institutional venues, decentralised initiatives such as Kultursommer Wien experiment with temporary interventions that activate streets, parks, and squares as cultural spaces. These practices align with Soja’s vision of spatial justice by foregrounding access to everyday public space as a right. They also reveal the structural barriers—social, linguistic, and institutional—that continue to mediate cultural participation. While Bennett highlights the need to reimagine cultural governance, Soja insists on recognising how space itself is implicated in the reproduction of inequality. Taken together, these perspectives frame decentralisation as both a cultural and spatial intervention, and help assess its potential—and its limits—as a pathway toward more inclusive policy.

Methodology

This research employed a multi-method qualitative and quantitative design, centring on ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and expert interviews to capture the complex social and spatial dynamics of public spaces in Vienna. The methodological framework was guided by an intersectional lens, with the aim of foregrounding voices and experiences often marginalised in urban research (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Over two consecutive years, a combination of participant observation, informal ethnographic interviews, and expert interviews was used to situate the research within everyday urban life and to amplify perspectives that are often overlooked in policy and cultural discourse.

Fieldwork in 2023 focused on Reithofferpark in the 15th district Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus, with observations and interviews conducted across three weekends in July and August (Karasz et al., 2023). A total of 57 individuals were reached through on-site conversations and short questionnaires. In 2024, the research expanded to include again Reithofferpark, Schrödingerplatz, and Großfeldsiedlung, and took place over three months from July to September, engaging 167 people (Schermer et al., 2024). Ethnographic interviews ranged from brief 15-minute exchanges to in-depth conversations lasting up to an hour, enabling flexible engagement that respected the participants' everyday rhythms. These interactions were embedded in daily park life and focused on topics such as park usage, cultural participation, and socio-economic circumstances. Spatial practices and perceptions were documented through mapping exercises, while short questionnaires provided quantitative data on trends and distributions. All qualitative material was systematically transcribed and coded, following the content analysis approach outlined by Mayring and Fenzl (2019). A collaboratively developed coding structure ensured analytical consistency and depth across the team.

Interviews were conducted in German, English, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, and Hungarian, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the neighbourhoods. The research team consisted of Mark Scherner, Slađana Adamović, Maria Vittoria Scarcia, Anna Ban, and Larissa Mannheim, whose varied backgrounds facilitated engagement with a wide range of participants and perspectives. Participant observation was used to trace how cultural events intersect with daily park use, informal gatherings, and social infrastructures. In parallel, everyday spatial practices were mapped to situate cultural participation within local geographies. To complement these perspectives, 16 stakeholder interviews were carried out—six in 2023 and ten in 2024. These included discussions with local business owners, representatives of cultural institutions, community organisers, and district-level policymakers, providing broader institutional context.

By adopting an intersectional approach, the study sought to reveal overlapping structures of inequality and to validate lived experience as a legitimate source of knowledge (Collins, 2000). This methodological orientation not only enriched the empirical material but also challenged hegemonic narratives, ensuring that marginalised perspectives were authentically represented.

Findings

Patterns of Attendance: Direct and Indirect Visitors Across Three Sites

The 2024 fieldwork conducted across three *Kultursommer Wien* locations—Reithofferpark, Großfeldsiedlung, and Schrödingerplatz—offers a comparative lens on audience composition and modes of engagement. Visitors were broadly classified as either ‘direct’—those who came specifically for the performance—or ‘indirect’—those who encountered the event while using the public space for other purposes. Yet this binary proved somewhat fluid: several individuals who initially appeared disinterested lingered, returned the following evening, or gradually shifted their attention toward the stage. These transitional behaviours suggest a grey zone between incidental exposure and emergent interest, shaped by spatial proximity, curiosity, and timing.

Attendance patterns varied significantly across the three sites. At Schrödingerplatz—a square adjacent to Donauzentrum, one of Vienna’s largest shopping centres—73.8% of respondents identified as direct visitors, many having travelled from other districts to attend specific acts. This points to the location’s strong pull effect, likely linked to favourable acoustics, high visibility, and substantial foot traffic. At the same time, it raises questions about reach: although the event physically took place in a local square, its audience skewed towards culturally engaged visitors from outside the neighbourhood.

By contrast, Reithofferpark and Großfeldsiedlung—both situated in socioeconomically diverse residential areas—presented more balanced profiles. At Reithofferpark, 46.9% of visitors were direct and 53.1% indirect; at Großfeldsiedlung, the figures were 43.9% and 56.1% respectively. These locations enabled more casual and spontaneous engagement, often involving residents who had limited previous exposure to institutionalised cultural offerings. Still, the presence of local audiences did not always equate to meaningful inclusion. Several indirect visitors expressed that they did not perceive the events as being “for them”, reflecting a lingering sense of cultural distance despite physical proximity.

Taken together, these findings underscore *Kultursommer Wien*’s ability to lower entry thresholds through its decentralised, open-air model. However, they also highlight a more complex interplay

between space, perception, and participation—where the act of being present does not always translate into a sense of cultural belonging.

Expanding Access and Encountering Limits for Local Audiences

While audience composition reveals who was physically present, it does not fully explain who engaged meaningfully. To understand this gap, the following section examines the structural and perceptual thresholds that shape inclusion in decentralised cultural settings. Figure 1 shows how often direct and indirect visitors attend cultural events in a typical year, offering a comparative snapshot across three sites. The contrast is striking: indirect visitors are significantly more likely to have little or no prior engagement with formal cultural offerings, particularly in Großfeldsiedlung and Reithofferpark.

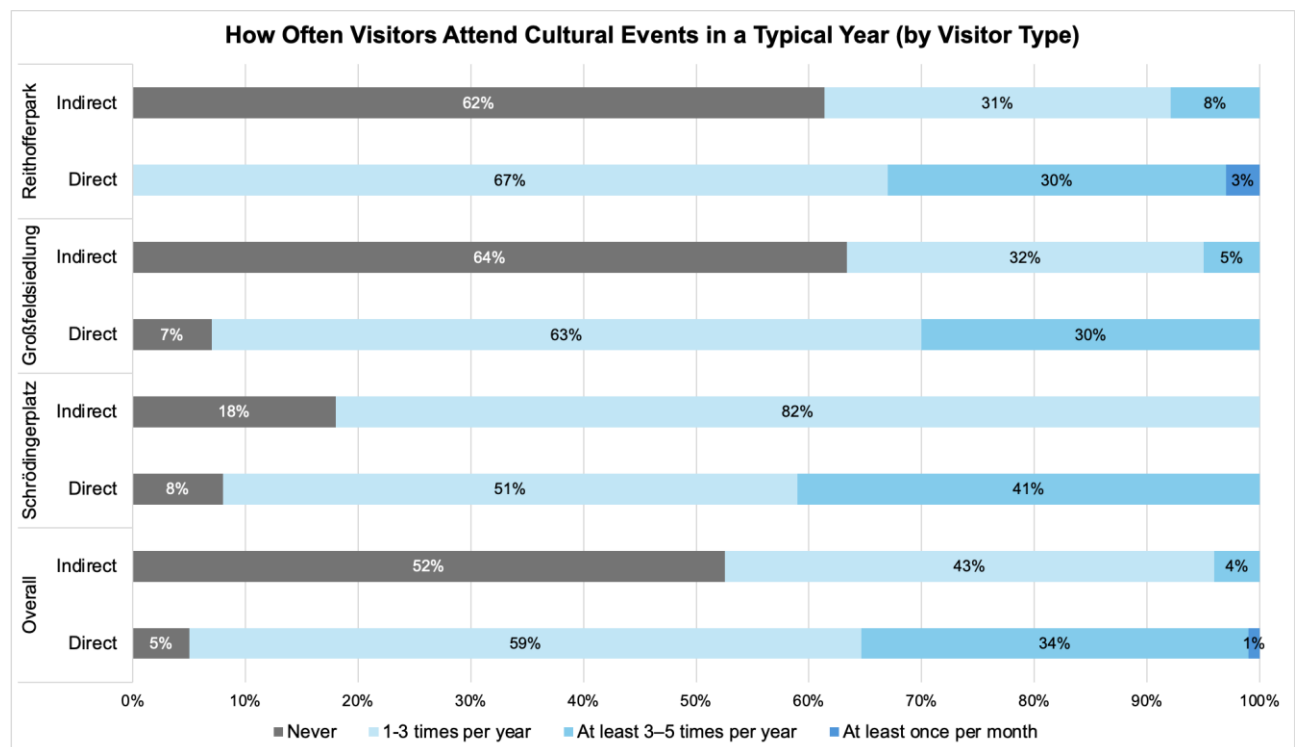


FIGURE 1. FREQUENCY OF CULTURAL EVENT ATTENDANCE AMONG DIRECT AND INDIRECT VISITORS BY LOCATION

Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork data included in Scherner et al. (2024).

Kultursommer Wien has demonstrated remarkable potential to attract a broad spectrum of new audiences by situating cultural experiences in everyday urban spaces such as parks. A key strength of the festival lies in its ability to reach individuals with limited or no prior engagement with institutionalised cultural offerings. All events are free of charge, thus removing a significant financial barrier and making them accessible to people for whom cost would otherwise be prohibitive. In

familiar neighbourhood environments, residents encounter diverse art forms they might not otherwise seek out, including those they may struggle to follow linguistically.

However, the effectiveness of this approach is shaped significantly by location and event structure, illustrating both promise and persistent limitations. Simply placing a cultural event in a particular neighbourhood does not automatically guarantee the meaningful inclusion of its residents, especially those traditionally less involved in cultural life. At Schrödingerplatz, for instance—despite its location in a local public space—the proximity to a major shopping centre and favourable acoustics tended to attract direct visitors, many of whom travelled from other districts. According to Soja, without intentional strategies to dismantle the “normalised geographies” of privilege and exclusion, such a pattern risks replicating spatial injustices (Soja 2010: 6). These dynamics resemble those often observed in centralised cultural venues, where cultural capital remains concentrated among already-affine audiences and the local community is marginalised as indirect or passive participants.

In Großfeldsiedlung, the situation reflects both opportunities and limitations. While the neighbourhood is marked by social diversity and lower engagement with institutionalised culture, the patterns of cultural attendance mirror those found in Reithofferpark. As Figure 1 shows, 64% of indirect visitors had never attended cultural events in a typical year—suggesting low baseline engagement—but the share of moderately engaged direct visitors (63%) is nearly identical across both sites. This parallel challenges assumptions that decentralisation alone generates distinct outcomes in marginalised areas. While the festival visibly increased exposure to culture among residents, particularly those who might not have actively sought it, many interactions remained observational or peripheral. In this context, exposure does not necessarily translate into integration.

Overall, *Kultursommer Wien* succeeds in expanding access and breaking down financial and logistical barriers. Its decentralised, local model creates a unique opportunity for spontaneous contact between art and residents who might otherwise be excluded. Yet the extent to which traditionally less-involved audiences are not only reached but meaningfully included depends on how well the event’s structure and communication genuinely lower participation thresholds.

Gendered Spatial Dynamics and the Uneven Effects of Kultursommer Wien

While the previous chapter examined broad barriers to access and inclusion, this section turns to how such dynamics play out through everyday spatial practices—particularly along gendered lines. Among the three sites examined, Reithofferpark and Großfeldsiedlung—both embedded in residential, socioeconomically diverse districts—offered a distinctive lens to assess how decentralised cultural events interact with everyday spatial practices.

At Reithofferpark, gendered patterns of use were sharply delineated: older men dominated the entrance area near Märzstraße, a busy thoroughfare with tram and underground connections, while women and girls tended to occupy the playground zone at the back—physically present in the park, yet spatially removed from the stage. Although the Kultursommer intervention introduced new dynamics such as enhanced lighting and security, these shifts did not fully disrupt existing hierarchies. While 57% of direct visitors were women—suggesting that formal participation was relatively gender-balanced—indirect engagement remained overwhelmingly male (94%), indicating that casual or incidental cultural participation by women was still constrained by everyday spatial norms (see Figure 2).

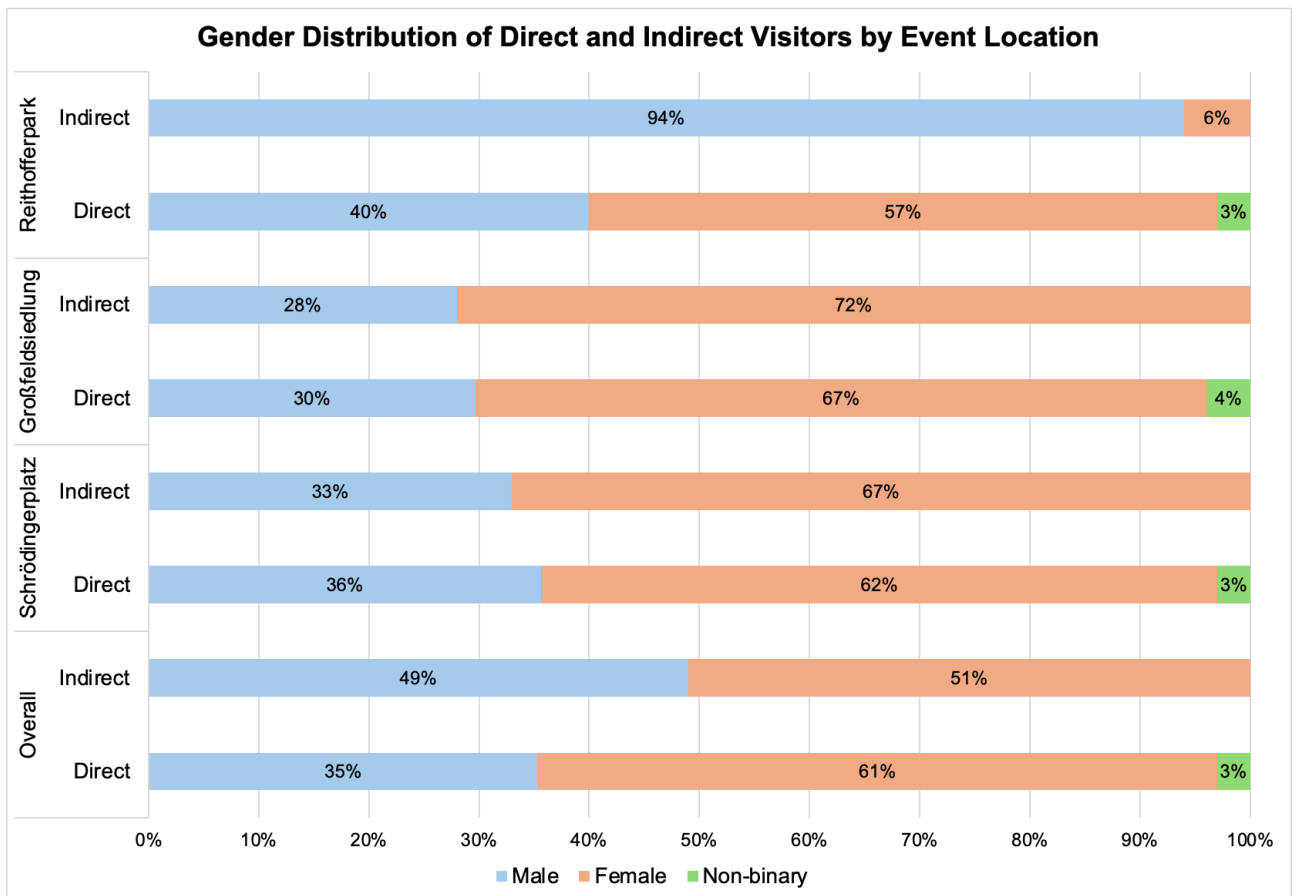


FIGURE 2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT VISITORS BY EVENT LOCATION
 Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork data included in Scherner et al. (2024).

The patterns observed resonate with Soja's (2010) concept of spatial justice, which highlights how power is embedded in space and manifests in differentiated access and exclusion. Even well-intentioned decentralised events may inadvertently reinforce unequal spatial dynamics unless designed with local usage patterns in mind. In Großfeldsiedlung, a large social housing estate, spatial boundaries were less formally defined but equally telling. Girls described avoiding areas near the

underground station and sports facilities, where boys often asserted informal territorial control. During Kultursommer, the placement of the stage in a part of the park previously used by girls effectively displaced their activities. Unlike in Reithofferpark—where some women reported a strengthened sense of safety and increased presence—the intervention here was perceived as intrusive: a disruption that reduced, rather than expanded, the perceived freedom of movement for younger female residents.

As Bennett (2001) reminds us, cultural democracy requires more than symbolic presence or access—it demands participatory structures that enable diverse publics to shape cultural life in ways that reflect their lived realities. In both Reithofferpark and Großfeldsiedlung, the absence of co-designed planning or locally informed implementation meant that the interventions largely followed a top-down logic. This may have limited their ability to meaningfully engage marginalised users, particularly women and girls, as active participants rather than passive recipients. Without such responsiveness, decentralised events risk reproducing the very marginalities they aim to address.

Addressing Language and Financial Barriers

While gendered dynamics reveal how spatial design can influence participation, other systemic barriers—such as cost and language—further shape who engages and who remains excluded. This chapter examines how *Kultursommer Wien* addresses these structural limitations through its approach to financial and linguistic accessibility.

By offering all events free of charge, *Kultursommer Wien* directly removes one of the most persistent barriers to cultural participation: financial accessibility. This is particularly crucial for individuals and families in neighbourhoods where cultural engagement is often limited by cost, allowing broader segments of the population—especially those who might otherwise not afford it—to encounter culture in their daily lives.

On the language front, *Kultursommer Wien* has made active efforts to respond to Vienna's linguistic diversity. In recent years, the festival has increased its focus on multilingual communication. Programme announcements, artist introductions, and social media outreach began appearing in several languages, and specific performances catered to different linguistic communities. Some events were held exclusively in languages other than German—most commonly English—while artists also performed in other languages not explicitly listed in the programme. These moments allowed artists to reach residents who might not speak German or English fluently, or who are not regularly exposed to those languages in cultural contexts. This helped make the events more approachable for residents from multilingual households, an important step given that many indirect and potential visitors speak a language other than German at home.

While the intention to break down language barriers has clearly grown—especially as reaching marginalised communities became a more explicit goal—language accessibility remains incomplete. Many programme materials and event communications are still predominantly in German and English, limiting access for those less fluent in either. Marginalised communities, particularly individuals unfamiliar with institutionalised culture, often learn about events only through word-of-mouth or by encountering them directly in public space—missing out on more formal channels of communication.

Ultimately, *Kultursommer Wien*'s free, neighbourhood-based programming and growing multilingualism mark substantial progress when compared to centralised models. Yet to fully reach and involve marginalised and multilingual communities, further expansion of participatory formats and consistently accessible, multilingual outreach remains essential.

Conclusion

This paper has explored *Kultursommer Wien* through the lens of decentralised cultural policy, asking how such interventions may expand access for residents typically underrepresented in institutionalised culture—and where their limitations lie. Framed by the concepts of cultural democracy (Bennett, 2001), critiques of centralised models, and spatial justice (Soja, 2010), the study examined how decentralisation operates in practice and whether it can meaningfully disrupt entrenched inequalities.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted across two editions of the festival—with comparative findings focused on three neighbourhoods in 2024—the research highlights how *Kultursommer Wien* helps lower structural barriers by offering free programming in familiar, everyday public spaces. These spatial and financial shifts facilitated new forms of cultural exposure, particularly among residents with limited prior engagement. Yet exposure did not always translate into deeper forms of inclusion. Gendered spatial norms, limited multilingual communication, and the absence of locally embedded planning processes affected how participation unfolded across sites. Rather than presenting decentralisation as a solution in itself, this study offers a situated reflection on its potential and constraints. *Kultursommer Wien* illustrates how decentralised initiatives can broaden cultural geographies—but also how, without deliberate strategies of co-creation, they may fall short of fully addressing the exclusions they seek to counter.

As decentralised models gain institutional support across Europe, further research is needed to explore their long-term effects. Future studies might examine how repeated exposure influences cultural habits, or how shared governance structures could foster deeper community ownership.

Ultimately, meaningful cultural access will depend on policies that not only reach communities but grow from within them—responsive to local realities and co-designed with those they aim to include.

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Accessibility in Museum Management: Insights by Review Integrating DEAI and CRPD Principles

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces an innovative paradigm that uniquely applies the DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) framework exclusively to disability rights, operationalised through the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) within museum contexts. This novel approach marks the first focused deployment of DEAI principles centred solely on persons with disabilities, departing from generic applications. The paradigm articulates a multidimensional matrix of thematic indicators aligned with CRPD mandates, enabling robust evaluation and strategic enhancement of accessibility and inclusion in cultural heritage institutions. Its versatility allows adaptation across governance structures, policy

Keywords:

CRPD

People with
Disabilities

Accessibility

DEAI

Museum

development, and operational management, facilitating systemic transformation toward disability-centred equity. By bridging international human rights law with actionable, evidence-based frameworks, this work pioneers an advanced methodology for embedding disability inclusion into museum praxis. This contribution significantly expands DEAI's conceptual boundaries, establishing a replicable and scalable model for culturally grounded, legally informed accessibility innovation.

Introduction

This paper presents a systematic review of international literature, legal frameworks, and sectoral policy documents addressing the intersection of accessibility, disability rights, and museum management. Rather than reporting on original field research, it develops a conceptual framework that integrates the Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) approach with the CRPD, laying the groundwork for future empirical validation. In an era of mounting complexity and perpetual transformation on a global scale, the acknowledgement of vulnerability as an inherent and universal facet of the human condition stands as a pivotal step in the establishment of a more egalitarian society (Guevara, 2021). Within this context, diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion are no longer regarded as mere ethical commitments; rather, they are recognised as strategic levers that enhance managerial resilience, innovation, and overall performance (Okatta et al., 2024). This vision must extend to the cultural sector, as culture constitutes not only a driver of well-being but a structural condition for inclusive and just societies, and a catalyst for the realisation of human rights (UNHRC, 2023). Among the cultural section, this is particularly true for the museums, which today function not only as custodians of heritage but also as active agents of social transformation. Consequently, they are called to pursue not only economic but also social sustainability goals (Napolitano & Bifulco, 2024). Ensuring access to culture for historically marginalised groups is therefore a key step toward making museums agents of social inclusion (Bada, 2022; Sandell, 2002). In these groups, persons with disabilities (hereafter PwD) represent the largest and often most invisible community. Despite constituting a significant portion of the global population, PwD continue to be underrepresented both as visitors in the field of audience development (Hadley, 2021), as professionals (Historic England & Direct Access, 2025; American Alliance of Museums, 2022), and as active participation in its creation (OECD, 2022; Romainville, 2015) within the museum sector.

Nevertheless, despite the advancement of the legal framework, the effective implementation of this right remains inconsistent and fragmented across cultural institution management and governance. In recent years, the DEAI framework (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion) has emerged as a powerful conceptual and operational model, particularly in Anglo-American contexts, to guide museums in rethinking their missions and practices (Berubè et al., 2024). The DEAI approach, in its commitment to addressing structural inequalities and promoting inclusive governance, calls upon institutions to engage in critical reflection, posing fundamental questions regarding the inclusivity of their respective cultural narratives and the extent of representation and participation within them. Despite the mounting cognisance that diversity and accessibility can enhance managerial performance — by increasing visitor engagement, fortifying institutional legitimacy, and cultivating internal cohesion (Ng & Stephenson, 2016; Cerdan Chiscano & Jiménez-Zarco, 2021)— there remains a lack of integrated tools and structured analyses that effectively link the international legal

framework on the rights of persons with disabilities with the internal policies and daily practices of museums.

This paper aims to define an operational paradigm for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in museums by integrating the DEAI framework with the principles enshrined in the CRPD. It proposes a tool that translates cultural rights into measurable practices, repositioning the museum as an active agent of social justice.

The following research question guides this work:
What insights emerge from the integration of DEAI principles and CRPD obligations to guide museums in designing inclusive, rights-based accessibility strategies?

By bridging legal standards with institutional practices, this research takes an interdisciplinary approach combining legal analysis and cultural management, contributing to the development of inclusive and rights-based strategies for museums.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK INFORMING THE RESEARCH

In recent decades, the role of museums has undergone a substantial transformation: from authoritative institutions focused on their collections, they have become institutions with a broader and more heartfelt social mission, oriented towards the public and committed to combating inequality and exclusion (Puček, 2021). The traditional perception of museums as elitist institutions focused on conservation and scientific research has changed significantly with the adoption of this broader social mission (Bifulco and Tregua, 2022). Since the late 1990s, increasing attention has been paid to museums and their contribution to social inclusion (Sandell, 2002; Sandell, 2005; Morse, 2019; Eardley and Jones, 2025). There is growing evidence that the concepts of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion of all shapes of humanity are paramount in the museum field, while also presenting considerable challenges (Nightingale and Sandell, 2012). In response, the museum sector has sought to include historically marginalized voices—such as persons with disabilities (PwDs)—in narratives, exhibitions, and spaces by focusing on accessibility and inclusion, with PwDs increasingly recognized as fundamental to the contemporary museum paradigm. While the DEAI framework addresses multiple dimensions of diversity, including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, this paper focuses specifically on its intersection with disability and the rights of PwDs, positioning them as both beneficiaries and agents of change within cultural institutions. From a disability perspective, contributions frequently concentrate on the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in museum exhibitions. This is since they are seldom recognised as a social minority with their own culture and identity (Cachia, 2013; Martins, 2021). This exclusion stems largely from persistent barriers —physical, sensory, cognitive, attitudinal, economic, digital and communicative—

that hinder full and equal access to cultural spaces, even in the presence of international and national legislation promoting reasonable accommodation and universal access (Leahy and Ferri, 2023). The right to participate in cultural life is explicitly recognised by Article 30 of the CRPD, which obliges States to ensure that cultural heritage is accessible and inclusive for all, without discrimination. In this context, the museum visit can be regarded not only as a leisure activity but also as a means of exercising a fundamental human right, with educational, relational, and symbolic significance (Veal, 2023). The CRPD establishes a legally binding framework for inclusion across all life spheres. Article 30 of the CRPD provides a normative foundation for the right of PwDs to access and participate fully in cultural life, articulating a human rights model that promotes not only access but also active engagement of PwDs as cultural agents and producers (Degener, 2017; Broderick & Ferri, 2019; Smith & Stein, 2020). The right to cultural participation is closely tied to the recognition of diversity, ensuring accessibility in both physical and digital spaces, and safeguarding substantive equality.

The concept of Diversity is explicitly recognised in the preamble of the Convention (i), where States Parties affirm the diversity of PwDs as a social value. Article 3(d) establishes respect for difference and acceptance of PwDs as integral to human diversity. Article 30(4) acknowledges the right to recognition and appreciation of linguistic diversity and cultural identity, including sign language and Deaf culture. This framing aligns with the social model of disability and invites museums to critically re-evaluate their representational choices and curatorial narratives regarding PwDs. The principle of Equity is articulated in Article 30(1), affirming the right to cultural participation on an equal footing. Museums must consider the real opportunities for PwDs to engage fully. Equality is also addressed in Articles 27 (work) and 24 (education), while Article 5 introduces the concept of reasonable accommodation. Article 1 summarises the Convention's aim to ensure full and equal enjoyment of human rights by PwDs. Accessibility is mandated in Article 30(1), requiring States Parties to make cultural products, activities, and sites accessible, including museums and monuments. This links to Article 9, which designates accessibility as a general right and principle, and Article 3(f), which emphasises it as a guiding principle. Accessibility involves facilitators across digital, physical, sensory, cognitive, attitudinal, and cultural domains. Finally, Inclusion is fundamental to achieving equity and accessibility, as referenced in Articles 4(3) and 3(c). Although the DEAI framework was originally a management tool, anchoring it in CRPD rights confers normative legitimacy and a transformative role in promoting full cultural participation for PwDs. This intersection underscores the potential for aligning managerial change strategies with human rights obligations, thereby moving from aspirational discourse to enforceable commitments. The following table (Table 1) summarises the key components of the DEAI framework, highlighting their legal basis in the CRPD, practical applications in museums, and their broader social significance.

Dimension	Definition/Focus	Legal basis (CRPD)	Implications for Museums	Broader Social Impact
Diversity	Recognition and respect for the variety of identities and experiences, including disability as a valued social difference.	Preamble; Art. 3(d); Art. 30(4)	Reevaluate curatorial narratives to include marginalized identities, promote linguistic and cultural diversity (e.g., Deaf culture).	Strengthens social cohesion and cultural richness.
Equity	Ensuring fair treatment, opportunities, and resources tailored to individual needs to achieve substantive equality.	Art. 1; Art. 3(d); Art. 5; Art. 27; Art. 24; Art. 30(1)	Provide reasonable accommodations; design programs allowing full participation of PwDs.	Enables dismantling of systemic barriers and promotes social justice.
Accessibility	Guaranteeing physical, sensory, cognitive, digital, attitudinal, and communicative access to cultural products, activities, and spaces.	Art. 3(f); Art. 9; Art. 30(1)	Implement universal design principles; remove barriers in exhibitions and facilities; enhance communication modes.	Facilitates equal access to culture and knowledge for all individuals.
Inclusion	Creating an environment where all individuals, particularly PwDs, are actively engaged and valued as cultural participants and contributors.	Art. 3(c); Art. 4(3); Art. 30(1)	Embed DEAI values in institutional governance; involve PwDs in decision-making and programming.	Promotes belonging, empowerment, and cultural democracy.

TABLE 1. Overview of DEAI Principles with References to the CRPD

Source: Authors' elaboration

Anchoring DEAI within the CRPD reinforces its normative depth and ensures that inclusion efforts in the museum sector are both ethically grounded and legally compliant. It moves institutions beyond discretionary, project-based inclusion towards structural, rights-driven transformation.

From a managerial perspective, DEAI has been associated with improved institutional performance, innovation, and legitimacy (Okatta et al., 2024; Jerónimo et al., 2022). Theoretical lenses such as resource-based theory and social identity theory further support the benefits of inclusive practices for organisational resilience and user engagement (Al Hamad et al., 2024; Okatta, Ajayi & Olawale, 2024).

Policy frameworks have increasingly endorsed DEAI principles. The UNESCO Recommendation on Museums (2015), the ICOM Code of Ethics, and the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 all underscore the importance of accessibility and equity in cultural governance. Empirical tools developed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the Cultural Competence Learning Institute

(CCLI), and the recent NEMO 2024 report provide valuable benchmarks, yet reveal persistent fragmentation, particularly regarding disability inclusion.

Despite these developments, many museums—especially in Europe—still lack integrated tools to assess their performance in relation to disability. Inclusion is often interpreted narrowly as physical accessibility, with limited attention to organisational culture, staff training, or user involvement. This underscores the need for a self-assessment model that bridges the normative rigour of the CRPD with the practical orientation of DEAI.

Finally, embedding DEAI principles in museum practice contributes to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—notably SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). In this sense, accessibility becomes not only a legal obligation but also a strategic lever for long-term institutional sustainability and social impact.

This integrated theoretical framework lays the foundation for the DEAI–CRPD model proposed in this study: a rights-based, actionable, and operationally meaningful tool to support self-assessment and institutional transformation in the museum sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic review methodology (Snyder, 2019) combining legal analysis and literature synthesis to explore how museums can align managerial practices with the rights of persons with disabilities. The process began with an in-depth legal and documentary analysis of the CRPD and its interpretative instruments, including General Comments and relevant soft law documents. From this analysis, key normative principles were identified and translated into qualitative indicators, which served as the foundation for the construction of a DEAI-based framework. The framework was designed to function as a dual-purpose tool: it can be used both as a desk-based assessment grid for analysing institutional materials (e.g., websites, accessibility statements, policy documents, and social reports) and as a basis for a set of semi-structured interview questions to be used in future research with museum professionals. The interpretative framework developed through this process enables a structured evaluation of how museums align—or fail to align—with both DEAI values and CRPD obligations. Its structure allows for scalability, empirical validation, and potential adoption by museums as a tool for self-reflection and accountability.

At the same time, the research retains an interdisciplinary approach (Parkhomenko and Berezovska, 2020), combining legal analysis and cultural management, with the aim of developing a set of qualitative indicators that integrate the principles of DEAI with the rights of persons with disabilities, as emphasised by the CRPD, as well as hard and soft legislation concerning accessibility and

participation in cultural life for PwDs. By examining the intersection of legal obligations, managerial frameworks, and practical tools, the study seeks to offer a foundation for inclusive policy design and institutional self-assessment. The methodological approach adopted reflects a transformative intent: it does not merely assess the current state of inclusion in Italian museums but proposes a new integrated perspective that connects the international legal framework (CRPD) with the value-based and operational DEAI framework. The self-assessment tool developed thus serves as a paradigmatic device, capable of linking legal obligations with managerial practices. By bridging legal norms and cultural management strategies, this perspective encourages museums to reinterpret their social function in light of the rights of persons with disabilities, fostering a systemic and sustainable change in institutional culture. An interdisciplinary methodology was chosen in light of recent studies highlighting its central role in addressing contemporary managerial challenges (Shavkun and Dybchynska, 2025).

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The following synoptic table (Table 2) outlines the interpretative framework developed in this study to assess how museums address diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion with a specific focus on the rights of PwDs as established by the CRPD.

This framework adopts an integrated perspective grounded in the convergence of DEAI principles and the CRPD's human rights paradigm. As discussed above, the DEAI framework, when anchored in the CRPD, acquires normative legitimacy and transformative potential, enabling museums to move from aspirational goals to enforceable commitments in the realm of cultural participation.

Dimension	Observable indicator	Collection method/s
Diversity	Percentage of employees with disabilities out of total staff	HR analysis
	Percentage of people with disabilities in decision-making roles (e.g. management, curatorship)	interviews
	Percentage of people with disabilities involved in voluntary work or internships	HR analysis/interviews
	Variety of disabilities represented in museum programmes	Programme analysis
	Presence of explicit disability inclusion policies	Documentary analysis

	Percentage of suppliers/partners with disability-inclusive policies	Contract/partnership analysis
	Presence of testimonies of people with disabilities in exhibition narratives	Content/exhibition analysis
Equity	Presence of inclusive recruitment policies and job placement programmes	HR and policy
	Accessibility of digital and physical work tools	Accessibility testing
	Proportion of accessible educational programmes (accessible resources)	Digital content and material analysis
	Staff training on inclusion of people with disabilities	Interviews/documentation
	Presence of a dedicated budget for inclusion	Financial analysis
	Grievance mechanisms/access to justice for discrimination	Policy and procedure analysis
	Equitable access to internships and training opportunities	HR analysis/interviews
Accessibility	Proportion of accessible spaces (entrances, halls, bathrooms, etc.)	Accessibility audits
	Adoption of assistive technologies (audioguides, subtitles, augmented reality)	Feedback from visitors with disabilities
	Availability of accessible materials (Braille, LIS, audiodescriptions, QR codes)	Analysis of services
	Presence of an accessibility officer	Interview
	Existence of an up-to-date accessibility plan	Documentary analysis
	Proportion of WCAG-compliant museum websites and apps	Digital audit
	Ex-ante accessibility assessment for new exhibitions/events	Project analysis
	Presence of tactile routes and permanent multisensory mapping	On-site audit
Inclusion	Number of co-design initiatives with persons with disabilities	Project analysis
	Existence of an inclusive advisory board with members with disabilities	Governance analysis
	Satisfaction of persons with disabilities involved	Questionnaires/interviews

	Percentage of events and exhibitions co-designed with persons with disabilities	Programming analysis
	Presence of inclusive communication policies	Institutional communication analysis
	Number of public consultations to design inclusive services	Acts/documents analysis
	Participation of persons with disabilities in internal strategic boards	Governance analysis
	Presence of ongoing co-creative programmes	Programme analysis/interviews

TABLE 2. Observable indicators for each DEAI dimension and its collection methods

Source: Authors' elaboration

The table presents a structured set of qualitative indicators designed to assess the level of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in museum institutions, with a specific focus on the rights of persons with disabilities (PWD), as articulated by the CRPD. Each indicator is organised under one of the four DEAI dimensions and is associated with one or more data collection methods to ensure empirical verifiability and adaptability across institutional contexts.

The selected indicators are intentionally designed to support both qualitative and quantitative evaluations, offering flexibility in application and facilitating comparative assessments over time or across institutions. In this regard, museums are called upon not merely to provide access, but to proactively dismantle structural barriers, promote inclusive governance, and involve persons with disabilities as agents in the co-creation of cultural experiences. The framework adopts a dual structure: it serves both as a diagnostic tool to evaluate how museums currently reflect DEAI principles in their institutional structures, programs, and public communication, and as a self-assessment guide that museums can use to reflect critically on their own policies and practices, and to identify areas for improvement. In this perspective, the DEAI–CRPD framework is not only a tool for self-assessment, but a lever for systemic change—aligning museum practices with global human rights and sustainability goals. Taken together, these indicators provide a multi-dimensional framework for assessing how museum institutions align with the normative and operational standards of the CRPD and DEAI principles. The structure is designed to be both diagnostic and developmental, allowing for internal self-assessment, external benchmarking, and the identification of pathways for managerial transformation toward more inclusive cultural practices.

Furthermore, the DEAI framework represents a robust and innovative methodological approach for measuring and guiding change within museum practices, fostering the development of more inclusive

and sustainable managerial models capable of addressing the challenges of the contemporary world. Its integration into museum operations can also be understood as a strategic contribution to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those aligned with social sustainability. First, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities – is directly supported by DEAI, which places equity and inclusion at the core of institutional transformation. By promoting the active participation of persons with disabilities and other historically marginalised communities, museums can dismantle social barriers and foster equal opportunities, ultimately contributing to more equitable cultural and professional environments (UNESCO, 2015; Degener, 2017). Second, DEAI implementation advances SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. As spaces of cultural expression and civic engagement, museums that adopt inclusive and accessible governance can become genuine hubs of social integration, encouraging belonging and intercultural dialogue. In this sense, DEAI-aligned museums contribute to the resilience and sustainability of local communities (UNESCO & UN-Habitat, 2021). Finally, although SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth is often associated with productivity, it also calls for inclusive and dignified workplaces. Applying the DEAI framework in museums promotes managerial cultures that value diverse talents and experiences, enhancing staff well-being and contributing to a socially balanced model of economic development (ILO, 2019; AAM, 2022).

By embedding DEAI principles, museums can align their institutional mission with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that cultural inclusion is not only a value but a measurable driver of social impact. This conceptual convergence of DEAI and CRPD principles reflects an interdisciplinary approach combining legal analysis and cultural management, offering a foundation for operationalising cultural rights through inclusive institutional design.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH TRAJECTORIES

The present study aims to address existing gaps by proposing an integrated framework that combines the DEAI approach with the CRPD's rights-based paradigm. This integration is both timely and necessary: while the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) movement provides practical, managerial tools for fostering inclusion, the CRPD ensures that these efforts are grounded in binding international human rights standards. The objective of this research is to deliver a self-assessment model that is operationally useful and ethically robust. This model will move beyond a compliance-oriented view and towards a proactive, participatory, and structurally embedded model of accessibility. This fundamental principle undergirds the rationale of the DEAI–CRPD framework, which asserts that cultural institutions should not merely provide access but also proactively dismantle barriers, promote inclusive governance, and ensure that persons with disabilities are central to the shaping of cultural experiences. Consequently, this research contributes a novel tool for bridging legal

and managerial domains, offering a replicable model for assessing and advancing inclusion within the museum sector.

Subsequent research will concentrate on the operationalisation of the proposed indicators into a structured questionnaire to be administered to museums. Each indicator will be translated into one or more direct questions, designed with multiple-choice response options and evaluated on a Likert scale. This facilitates systematic data collection and allows for both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. This development will facilitate large-scale comparative assessments, enable the monitoring of progress over time, and provide institutions with quantifiable insights into their performance. In the subsequent phase of this research, the questionnaire will be administered to a purposive sample of Italian museums selected to ensure representativeness across different managerial models (e.g., public, private, hybrid) and diverse geographical areas. This sampling strategy aims to capture the heterogeneity of the national museum landscape and to generate robust, generalizable data on current accessibility practices and inclusion policies. Furthermore, field testing and feedback from museum professionals and persons with disabilities will inform iterative refinement of the tool to enhance its validity, usability, and impact across diverse cultural contexts.

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Heritage Conservation Policy and its Ramifications in the Stratification of Contemporary Architecture

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ABSTRACT

In the preservation of cultural heritage, contemporary interventions on architectural heritage represent a singularity due to the functional character of architecture, which sometimes requires transforming a listed building, making modifications or additions to update an existing use or to introduce a new one. While in the past interventions were carried out without a specific policy defined to do so, contemporary interventions are carried out following the principles defined by the Venice Charter of 1964. Contemporary *ex novo* architecture is starting to be assessed cultural significance, with some cases of listings as heritage in some European countries. However, current policy determines that interventions on heritage nowadays shall be minimal and reversible, so contemporary strata don't necessarily set and persist in time like it happened in the past. The paper presents a doctoral research that delves into the ramifications of preservation policy on the persistence of contemporary interventions on architectural heritage.

Keywords:

Architectural
Heritage Policy

Cultural
significance

Contemporary
Architecture

Value Assessment

Introduction

This paper presents a PhD dissertation carried out at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, in international joint supervision with Università luav di Venezia, elaborating on the aspects of the dissertation related to cultural policy. The thesis, entitled "Superimposed Heritage. The persistence of contemporary interventions on architectural

heritage - Patrimonio Superpuesto. La persistencia de las intervenciones contemporáneas sobre el patrimonio arquitectónico" (2024) focuses on contemporary interventions on architectural heritage as a part of contemporary architectural production that, when acting on a listed building, are in a unique condition, partly due to the theoretical principles of the discipline of restoration that have shaped the policy that informs these interventions. The research studies in more detail the situation in Italy, however, having its architectural heritage management policies a theoretical origin developed at European level, and having detected parallels between different countries both in the protection of heritage (e. g. Sanz Rodríguez, 2019) and in contemporary interventions on it, the possibility of applying the conclusions to the European level is pointed out.

Architectural heritage protection

The built environment has evolved over time as a result of constructional and urban stratifications. Numerous buildings have come down to the present day as superimpositions of different historical periods, forming architectural palimpsests. Historically, these stratifications occurred organically, without a specific way of doing so having been established, and could be due to the use of existing spaces and materials, reconstruction or repairs, or adaptation to new demands of use (Fig. 1).



FIGURE 1. ROME. TABULARIUM. ORGANIC STRATIFICATION OF DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERIODS.

Source: Own work.

Although cases of appreciation of works of art or other human creations from the past have been known since Antiquity, it is considered that it was from the French Revolution, when the newly created State acquired ownership of expropriated property, that the protection and management of cultural

heritage began to be institutionalised and regulated (Choay, 1992 [2001]), largely as a way of supporting the construction of the identity of the new nation.

During the 18th century, theories began to develop that shaped monumental restoration as a discipline, with the main positions being those of Ruskin with conservative restoration and Viollet-le-Duc with stylistic restoration. In practice, stylistic restoration was predominant in Europe, despite the fact that on a theoretical level there were increasingly more voices against it (Jokilehto, 1986).

At the beginning of the 20th century, two different aspects of heritage policy were developed. On one hand, regarding what may be considered heritage, and on the other hand, regarding how to act to preserve a monument. Alois Riegl, as a preamble to a monument law proposal in Austria, formulated a typology of values that monuments could have in order to determine their cultural significance, laying the foundation for the value assessment that is now used directly or indirectly as a methodology in heritage designation. (de la Torre, 2002; Avrami et al., 2019). In parallel, the debate about how to restore monuments continued, leading to the Athens Charter of 1931, as a first attempt at consensus at the international level of a policy to follow when making an intervention on a monument. It was adopted by the League of Nations.

Theories continued to evolve, with the development of so-called modern and scientific restoration, to the point that, according to Javier Rivera Blanco (2008), the intervention process became long and, in a scenario like post-World War II Europe, it also became non-operational.

The theoretical debate then led to the creation of the Venice Charter in 1964, and, a year later, to the establishment of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The Charter has been adopted by most countries, and, with the support of ICOMOS as an advocate for the document, it is the foundation of most of the policy regarding heritage management. Possibly for these reasons, it remains the main doctrinal text in architectural preservation and conservation despite there having been many other charters that have come after. The principles established by the charter, which reflect the predominant theoretical position and which had precedents in practice, are compatibility of the materials and techniques applied and of use with the pre-existence, discernability of the additions or modifications to avoid misinterpretations, reversibility of the intervention to keep the possibility of restoring the monument to its state prior to the intervention, and minimal intervention to keep the pre-existence as much as possible as it was before the intervention.

Taking a step back, before architectural heritage is managed, as we pointed out, it is necessary to define what heritage is, with value assessments. In Europe, this is usually made through heritage lists that may exist at a national, regional or local level. In some cases, the local level of protection is implemented via urban planning, limiting the possible operations on buildings or urban areas of cultural significance –here it can be seen how directly theory is translated into practice in architecture,

through the policy that regulates what can or cannot be done in a construction site depending on the level of protection of an asset.

Heritage lists are framed into national heritage laws, which, in a general way, describe the assets that may be considered heritage, and why –because of their historical, artistic, ethnographic interest, etc. (see Sanz Rodríguez, 2019)–. As “monuments” have originally been a testimony of the past, the passage of time, intended as age or historical values, has always been an important factor when designating heritage.

Contemporary architectural heritage

In recent decades, a movement has emerged that acknowledges the cultural significance of contemporary architecture, with one of its initial steps being the creation of Docomomo (Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement) in 1988. Soon, the concern for conservation and valorisation of contemporary architectural heritage would extend from the modern movement to later periods. The Council of Europe (1991) issued a recommendation on the protection of the 20th-century architectural heritage. Later, in France, a label was created to acknowledge the “Patrimoine du vingtième siècle” (20th-century heritage), and in Italy, a census of Italian architecture from the second half of the 1900s was set up. Both the French and the Italian initiatives assess value to contemporary architecture but do not provide any legal protection against transformations or demolitions.

This acknowledgement about architectural heritage being increasingly more recent and the concern for its conservation may be motivated by the rapid changes in the built environment that occurred, especially in the second half of the 20th century. In the past, the span between the completion of a building and a possible later replacement was longer than in the present, as up until the advent of the concern for a sustainable consumption of resources, the norm was substituting a building with something new rather than reusing or adapting a pre-existence. This circumstance has not allowed recent architecture to be appreciated by its age or historical value, so initiatives led by experts in the field, like architects or art historians, have emerged. The reduction in the span between a building completion and its valorisation can be noted in some of the initiatives named before: while the French label “Patrimoine du vingtième siècle” has changed its name to “Architecture Contemporaine Remarquable” (Remarkable Contemporary Architecture), the Italian census is now named “census of Italian architectures from 1945 to today”, so both have left open the minimum age of buildings to be considered for inclusion. In Spain, the recently approved Law on Architectural Quality (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2022) seems to take on a different approach. Instead of taking the concept of heritage with its historical implications and adapting it to contemporary architecture, the law promotes valorisation of architecture, taking into consideration “architectural quality”, and developing the concept in Article 4. In the end, the outcome is similar to the French and Italian initiatives, with the

valorisation of contemporary architecture without legal protection, but the Spanish law may trigger an effective protection as in Article 3 it states that “As a matter of public interest, architecture shall be subject to protection, promotion, and dissemination by all public authorities” (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2022, 9).

In Italy, the law on cultural assets (“Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio”, D. L. n. 42/2004) includes the time factor to define the assets that may be subject to it, excluding those whose author is alive or that are less than seventy years old. A possible protection of the excluded works would fall within the scope of the law on copyright (“Protezione del diritto d'autore e di altri diritti connessi al suo esercizio”, L. n. 633/1941). However, this law proves to be contradictory and *de facto* ineffective in the protection of recent architecture, as it explicitly states that, in the case of architectural works, the author cannot oppose the modification of a work in progress or completed (Sabia, 1997, 60).

The modification of the Italian law on cultural assets that postpones the age of the assets to be protected from 50 to 70 years makes it difficult to protect contemporary architecture, while the construction techniques and materials used especially in the second half of the twentieth century tend to show signs of deterioration relatively quickly, requiring interventions before they reach seventy years of age (Mellano, 2019). On the other hand, Marco Dezzi Bardeschi (2019), states that this change was motivated by a large amount of public real estate assets that before passing the 70-year limit could be transferred from public ownership as they were not subject to protection yet, freeing the administration from the economic burden that their management would have entailed to the detriment of architectural heritage as a common good.

Looking at the French label of Remarkable contemporary architecture and the Italian census of architectures from 1945 to today, we see examples of contemporary *ex novo* architectures being assessed value, like the Quai Branly museum in Paris, labelled ten years after its completion in 2006, or a project for a winery in Sicily (Mandararossa Winery), completed in 2021 and included in the Italian census in 2024. In other countries contemporary *ex novo* architecture has been legally protected, like the Renault distribution centre by Norman Foster in the United Kingdom, completed in 1982 and listed in 2013, the Sainsbury Wing by Robert Ventury and Denise Scott Brown at National Gallery in London, inaugurated in 1991 and listed in 2018, or the Spanish Institute of Cultural Heritage (IPCE) in Madrid by Fernando Higueras, listed circa thirty years after its construction (Fig. 2).



FIGURE 2. MADRID. INSTITUTO DE PATRIMONIO CULTURAL DE ESPAÑA (IPCE).

Source: Own work.

The testimony of our time in architectural stratification

In the context pointed out before, contemporary interventions on architectural heritage find themselves in a singular condition. They are overlapped to a pre-existence that is listed, so they are not taken into consideration in the same way that *ex novo* architecture is, as they are conditioned by preservation principles. By these principles, interventions must be minimal and reversible. The Venice Charter states in article six that “no new (...) *must* be allowed” and again in article 13 “additions *cannot* be allowed”. Despite the context of these words includes exceptions, it is remarkable the use of a categorical language that makes interventions be perceived as something that should be avoided, that must be reversible, and thus, disposable. So, what happens if a contemporary intervention on architectural heritage is assessed value?

Looking at Italy, where the research focused on, there is one case that may have revealed to architectural preservation experts how contemporary interventions are disregarded: the musealisation of Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina (Sicily) by architect Franco Minissi. The Villa del Casale is an archaeological site with the remains of some of the most well-preserved Roman mosaics, inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997. In the 1950s, a project was developed to protect the ruins and allow visitors to see them. The project consisted of a covering made of perspex and a metallic structure, together with walkways, all of it resting on the remains of the walls of the villa. The new volume, with its materials and transparency, evoked how the villa could have been, but without attempting to reconstruct it (Alagna, 2008; Vivio, 2010). It was considered a paradigmatic

example of how to intervene following the principles of the Venice Charter, but, despite that, due to a lack of maintenance and degradation, the mosaics started suffering damages that led to questioning the intervention and to its dismantling and substitution by a different intervention, which started in 2007 (Fig. 3). Many experts tried to avoid the disappearance of Minissi's intervention, emphasising its value for the fields of architecture and preservation, but did not succeed (Bellanca, 2022; Vivio, 2015; Dezzi Bardeschi, 2015; Dezzi Bardeschi, 2019).



FIGURE 3. PIAZZA ARMERINA. ON THE LEFT, REMAINS OF MINISSI'S INTERVENTION. ON THE RIGHT, THE NEW ONE.

Source: Own work.

The case of the villa could be considered particular because the value of Minissi's intervention was not officially assessed. But there is a more recent case that reveals how contemporary interventions on heritage are vulnerable despite being assessed value, and their persistence is at risk. The case is the Galleria Nazionale at the Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma (Italy). The palace is a complex of medieval origin that was used as the main residence of the Farnese family and included an art gallery open to the public, a library and a theatre. It is composed of different historical strata that persisted until the 20th century but that suffered major damage during World War II. In 1963, it was listed as a monument by the Italian authorities (Vincoli in rete, n. d.), and at the same time, an intervention process started, with a project by architect Guido Canali. He designed a linear exhibition path that connected the different spaces of the Pilotta complex while allowing visitors to see the art collection. The theatre, which was destroyed, was reconstructed, but as it didn't meet current safety regulations, it was left empty for the visitors to see while passing through a ramp that took them to the scene, and from there to the rest of the museum. Another distinctive element is the construction in the north wing of the complex of a new floor that had previously existed with a scaffolding-like structure that hangs from the original brick walls, and from which the panels that host the works of art also hang (Fig. 4).

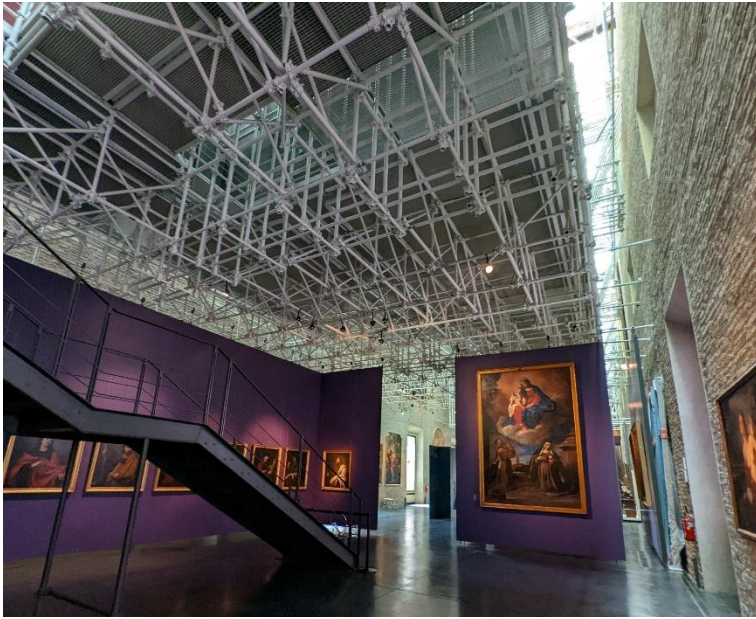


FIGURE 4. PARMA. PALAZZO DELLA PILOTTA. VIEW OF THE NORTH WING.

Source: Own work.

The intervention is included in the census of Italian architecture from 1945 to today (Censimento Architetture Contemporanee, 2013). Apart from the census, there is another initiative that further valorises a selection of projects from the census called Atlas of Contemporary Architecture, in which Canali's project can be found too (Atlante Architetture Contemporanee, n. d.). However, if we look at how value is being assessed, it can be seen how the heritage catalog that contains the entry of the Pilotta palace does not have any reference to its contemporary stratum, while in the census and the atlas there is just Canali's project, without clearly conceiving it as a part of the whole Pilotta complex. The values of the intervention are an addition to the ensemble of stratifications, but they are at risk because the intervention is not included in the heritage listing along with the pre-existence.

The intervention, subject to preservation principles and exempt from legal protection, has been modified recently (Verde, 2021) without taking into account the value, this time officially assessed by its inclusion in the census and the atlas of contemporary architecture. The exhibition path has changed, so it is no longer linear, and the walkway across the theatre has been removed, losing the spatiality created by Canali.

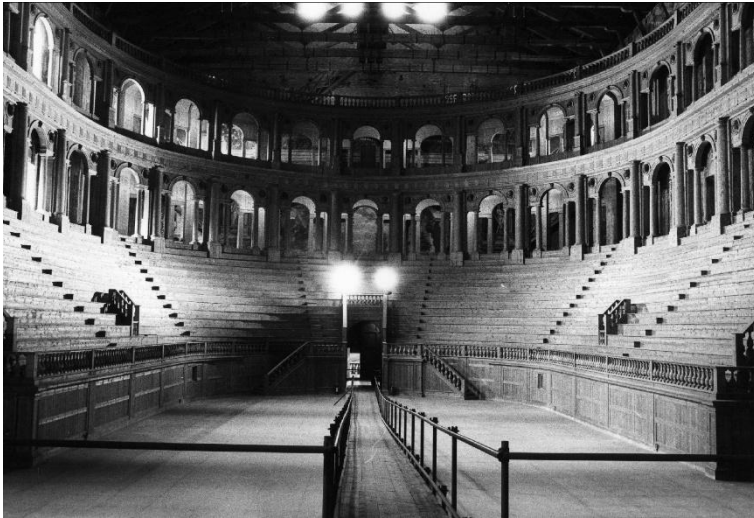


FIGURE 5. PARMA. PALAZZO DELLA PILOTTA. VIEW OF THE THEATRE WITH THE WALKWAY NOW REMOVED.

Source: Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali. CC-BY 4.0.

This case shows how the Venice Charter may impact on how differently interventions on architectural heritage are perceived compared to previous stratifications in an ensemble, creating a gap between pre- and post-listing strata.

Conclusions

The current picture reveals some contradictions between the valorisation of contemporary architecture and contemporary interventions on architectural heritage as a testimony of our time in a stratification.

The gap created between a pre-existence listed as heritage and later superpositions leads to a different treatment of contemporary interventions, prioritising their character as a reversible addition rather than the possible value that they may add to the whole.

Alois Riegl, when defining his value typology, acknowledged the fact that values could change over time. Despite he stated this already in 1903, policy usually has had a less dynamic vision, with value assessments that, once a building is listed, are no longer revised and adapted depending on possible changes in them or in how they are interpreted.

Thus, it is necessary to evaluate architectural stratifications as a *unicum*, so that contemporary interventions may stop being at risk as a consequence of the principles of reversibility and minimal intervention. Perhaps becoming aware that the time factor, intended as age and historical values, is no longer decisive in the assessment of cultural significance, along with an awareness of the dynamic character of values, could allow for the simple revision of existing list entries after an intervention is

made, to update the assessment of values and to include those that a contemporary intervention might add to the ensemble it belongs to.

There is a precedent in Italy that shows that the updating of value assessments could be implemented. In Italy, assets become protected when they become 70 years old, but this condition may be confirmed with the verification of their cultural interest. In the case of the Palazzina Masieri, first listed in 1953, the report that verifies its cultural interest was made in 2015, so the report that details its value assessment takes into consideration the contemporary interventions carried out on it by architect Carlo Scarpa in the 1970s (Fig. 6). Thus, a contemporary intervention on architecture not only has been assessed cultural significance, but is also included in the heritage list entry on which its protection depends.



FIGURE 6. VENICE. PALAZZINA MASIERI. CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTION BY CARLO SCARPA.

Source: Own work.

In the same way that heritage lists continue to grow, and contemporary architecture lists are elaborated, efforts could be directed to the valorisation and protection of contemporary interventions on architectural heritage, understanding that stratifications of different periods in architecture may include the testimony of our time, adding new meanings to the ensemble they are part of.

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Institutional Overload and Community Repositioning: Governance of Public Arts Residencies in Taiwan and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

Artist residencies serve as transnational networks for artist mobility and support. As ENCATC (2008) points out, artist mobility should be viewed as an investment in human capital that benefits economic markets and enhances labor market competitiveness. Taiwan has established specialized cultural policies supporting artist residencies and various public funding pathways for artist residency governance. However, these government-led artist residencies face two primary challenges: institutional obstacles stemming from legal and governance structures, and insufficient support for artistic professionalism at both policy and practical levels, thereby limiting their developmental potential. This study employs "Institutional Constraints" and "Community Repositioning" as dual analytical frameworks, focusing on the Taipei Artist Village case study. Through policy text analysis, administrative document review, and semi-structured interviews, it examines the governance models and common issues of Taiwan's public artist villages. Using Pascal Gielen's chronotope theory as an analytical tool, the study proposes a "Community Development Assessment Matrix" to identify implementation barriers across different chronotopes. The research finds that most institutions operate within the "Urban Cultural Strategy" quadrant but lack juristic person status and the arm's length principle, making institutional

Keywords:

Artists in
Residency,
Cultural Policy,
Cultural
Governance,
Institutional
Critique,
Community
Networking

professional autonomy difficult to achieve. Moreover, policies have long neglected cultural professionalism and community contexts, preventing institutions from clarifying their advantages and public positioning. The study ultimately advocates for "community repositioning" to address the absence of cultural professionalism and publicness, starting from feasible chronotope practices and gradually building relatively autonomous local support mechanisms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper extends the author's master's thesis research. I am grateful to my advisors, Director Chen Kuang-yi and Dean Jerry C Y Liu, for their careful guidance and support. I also thank all interviewees who agreed to participate and authorized the use of their experiences in this research, enabling this study's comprehensive presentation.

Introduction

The European cultural mobility information network On the Move identifies artist residencies as "the most frequent" form of mobility when discussing the relationship between mobility and cultural professionals' career development¹⁹. ENCATC (2008) further emphasizes in its Artists Moving & Learning report that "artists' mobility should be understood as an investment in human capital for the EU economic market and for increased competences for the labour market," calling for governmental collaboration at all levels to understand the positive impacts of artist mobility.

In East Asia, only Taiwan and Japan²⁰ have established cultural policy systems specifically supporting artist residency operations, with Taiwan being the earliest to develop relevant policy frameworks. However, through interviews with 24 stakeholders in Taipei Artist Village, this study reveals that Taiwan's government-led artist residencies face profound structural challenges.

This study conducts in-depth analysis using Taipei Artist Village as the primary case study. As one of Taiwan's earliest established artist villages, Taipei Artist Village was initially founded by the Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei City Government, and later commissioned to the Taipei Culture Foundation, a government-endowed foundation. Its historical position and governance model hold unique significance among Taiwan's public artist villages. The study also examines common challenges faced by other public artist villages, including constraints on funding utilization and personnel allocation in directly government-managed institutions.

Using Taipei Artist Village as the main case study, this paper analyzes the structural challenges facing contemporary artist residency institutions by examining the evolution of institutional frameworks and policy positioning. Methodologically, it employs policy and administrative document text analysis, comparing policy texts of the "Artist Village Operation Support Program Guidelines" from 2009 to 2024, supplemented by qualitative interview data from the author's master's thesis research, selecting six representative interviewees including artists, institutional administrators, supervisory agency

¹⁹ "Several forms of "mobility" exist, among which the most frequent are residencies, touring (to perform in another country than the one in which the artist/company is based), networking experiences (to connect with the artistic and cultural scene in another country through meetings, conferences, symposia etc.)"

²⁰ The Japan Cultural Agency has promoted the "Artist-in-Residence Model Regional Collaboration Support Program" since 2016, aiming to "create bases for cultural and artistic creation and dissemination locally through AIR activities, and promote local vitality enhancement with cultural arts at the core." Available at: <https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/geijutsubunka/chiiki/93992702.html> [Accessed July 12, 2025].

representatives, and community representatives²¹ as supplementary materials for institutional observation.

Development History of Artist Residencies in Taiwan

Taiwan's artist village development traces back to the National Artist Village construction project of the 1990s. During the post-martial law cultural construction wave, the Council for Cultural Affairs (predecessor to the Ministry of Culture) selected Caotun, Nantou for artist village campus construction similar to Olympic athlete villages²², viewing artist residencies as important tools for enhancing Taiwan's international cultural image. Although the National Artist Village construction project was interrupted by the 921 earthquake, its institutionalized thinking continued in local government artist village development models²³.

Coinciding with Taiwan's industrial transformation and economic boom—resulting in numerous idle industrial sites²⁴—and local governments gaining authority to establish cultural bureaus after martial law ended, the Council for Cultural Affairs proposed the "Pilot Implementation Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse of Unused Space" in 2001, providing clear pathways for local governments to acquire idle spaces. Public artist villages such as Taipei Artist Village and the Railway Arts Network²⁵ obtained

²¹ Interview data cited in this paper partially derives from qualitative interviews conducted for the author's master's thesis, involving six interviewees covering resident artists (A0103), artist village staff (B0102, B0103), supervisory agency representatives from policy implementation and policy-making institutions (C0101, C0104), and community representatives (E0201). This paper continues using original identification codes for interviewees, with all data having obtained interviewee consent and anonymized processing.

²² According to the 1991 "Artist Village Development Plan (Approved Version)," the National Artist Village construction project encompassed "four major functions: creative research and development, recreational leisure, educational outreach, and international exchange," bearing five policy objectives: "(1) Enhance Taiwan's international status in contemporary art; (2) Improve domestic artistic creation standards and train arts and cultural administrative personnel; (3) Popularize art among citizens and artisticize daily life; (4) Focus on integrated development with neighboring regions; (5) Encourage private participation and introduce professional management techniques" (Council for Cultural Affairs, 1991), showing its design initially bore multiple policy expectations including artistic creation, tourism and leisure, educational outreach, and regional development.

²³ According to the "Council for Cultural Affairs Artist Village Preparatory Office Briefing," the post-disaster Jiujiu Peak National Artist Village Preparatory Office transformed into the "Artist Village Resource Center," assisting local governments in establishing small-scale artist villages according to actual needs, organizing domestic and international artist residency programs, and developing toward artistic creation, information collection, consultation services, and international exchange.

²⁴ As staff member B0102 stated: "Actually, I think early Taipei City—including Huashan and Songshan at that time, still had some interesting things happening. When there wasn't a very clear understanding, and no one knew how to utilize these so-called sites left by industrial heritage, it instead allowed artists or art workers to initiate some temporary, what I would call 'experimental spaces.'" Guerrilla occupation of idle spaces by artist communities demonstrated artists' urgent need for creative spaces.

²⁵ The Railway Arts Network was originally an artist residency system planned by the central government (Council for Cultural Affairs), later returning sites to Taiwan Railway Corporation and local governments. According to Taiwan Visual Arts Alliance

their sites through this policy. It wasn't until 2009 that the Council for Cultural Affairs officially promulgated the "Subsidy Guidelines for Artist Village Operation Support Programs," marking the formal institutionalization of Taiwan's artist residency policy.

However, while Taiwan has specialized cultural policy for "Artist Village Operation Support Programs" and "Ministry of Culture International Cultural Exchange Programs" supporting artists' residencies at renowned international institutions, it has consistently lacked large-scale professional artist residency institutions directly invested and constructed by the central government. In contrast, successful international artist residency institutions often possess clear professional positioning and relatively independent governance structures. To better understand the establishment backgrounds and visions of different artist residency institutions, the author constructed a "community model" quadrant system, expanding along two axes: "agency/control" and "value orientation":

keyword entries, in 2021, the Railway Arts Network sharply decreased from 24 sites to 3, no longer under central government jurisdiction. Available at: <https://tcaaarchive.org/Keyword/Entry/1831> [Accessed July 11, 2025]

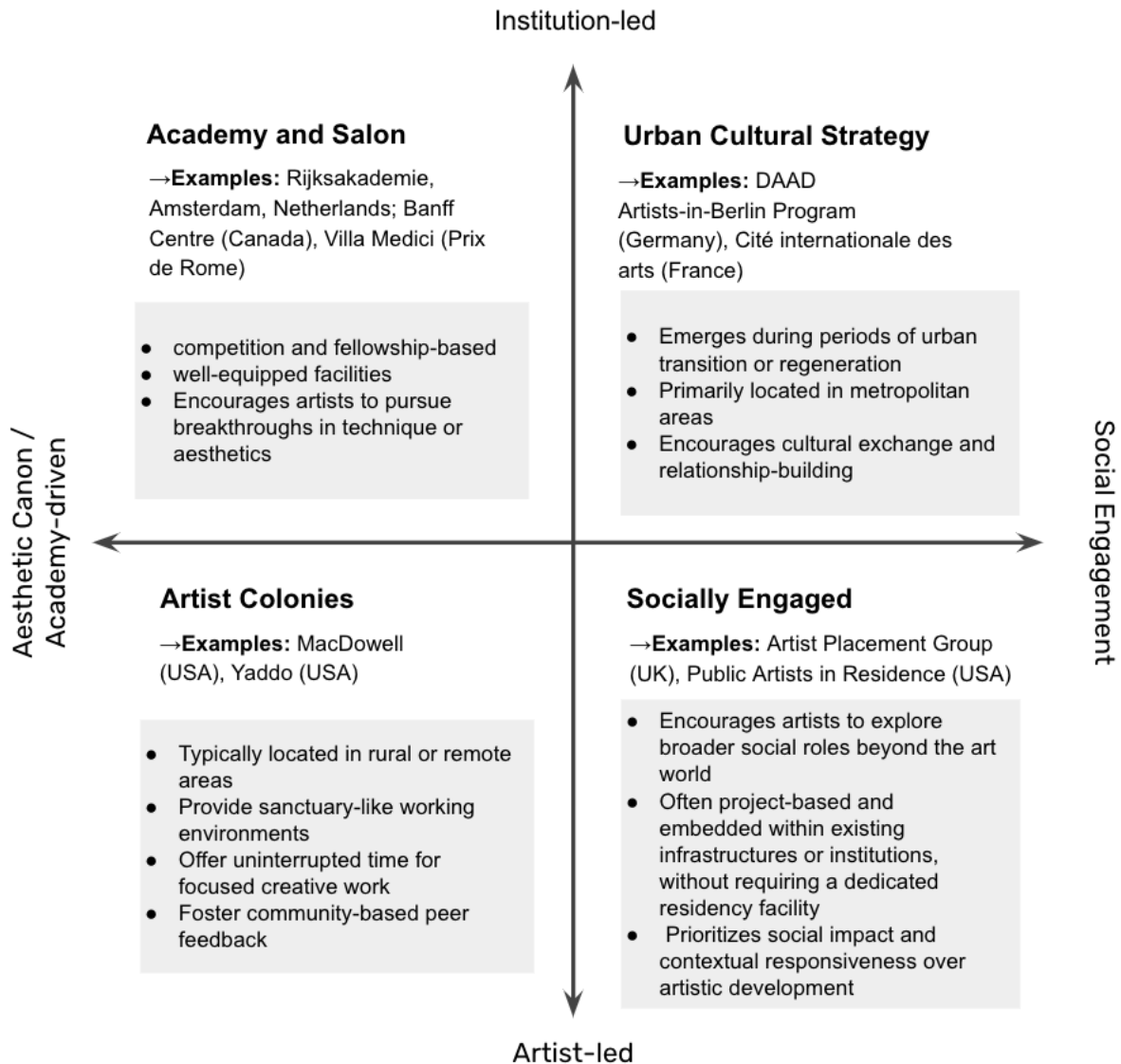


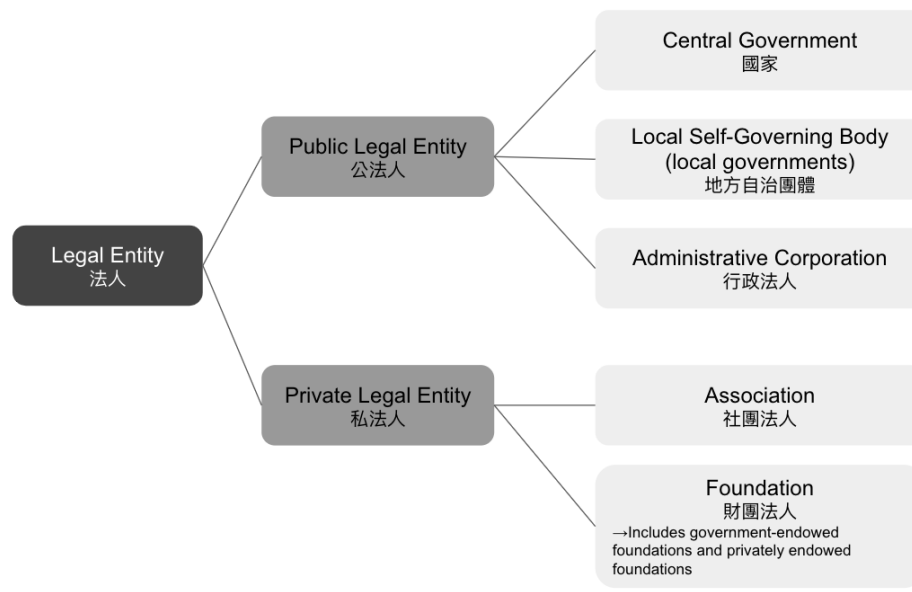
FIGURE 1. COMMUNITY MODEL QUADRANT SYSTEM FOR ARTIST RESIDENCY INSTITUTIONS. Source: Author's own elaboration.

"Institution-led" encompasses two systems: first, the Academy and Salon Model beginning with the 17th-century *Prix de Rome*, demonstrating high elitism and competitive nature, with institutions typically having extremely high professional reputations and encouraging artists to pursue professional breakthroughs; second, the Urban Cultural Strategy Model emerging in the 1960s, incorporating artist mobility into urban development strategies and emphasizing the importance of establishing international cultural relations and cross-cultural understanding. "Artist-led" similarly covers two models: first, Artist Colonies Model rising in the late 19th century, embodying ideals of artists' autonomous assembly and collaborative living and creation, with these institutions focusing on artists' personal career development and providing sanctuary spaces; second, the Socially

Engaged Model initiated in the 1960s, from the British Artist Placement Group (APG) to the American Artists-in-Residence in Government (AIRG)²⁶, redefining artists' social roles as "creative outsiders" or "problem-solvers." This quadrant system's value lies in understanding institutions' establishment historical contexts, advantages and disadvantages of community agency, and their positioning within the artistic ecosystem. Institutions may also move and transform between quadrants as they develop.

Governance Challenges of Taiwan's Public Artist Residencies

According to the aforementioned chart classification, Taiwan's public artist villages almost entirely fall within the "Urban Cultural Strategy" quadrant, partly due to the aforementioned lack of cultural construction history and partly reflecting policy thinking homogenization. More importantly, even within the same quadrant, different governance models can lead to entirely different developmental outcomes. The author preliminarily categorizes Taiwan's currently operating public artist villages into four types based on governance models: (1) Direct Government Management Type, (2) Outsourced Management Type, (3) Administrative Corporation Concurrent Operation Type and Other Institution Concurrent Operation Type (including administrative corporations and municipal museums), and (4) Government-Endowed Foundation Type.



²⁶ Traceable to Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1976 proposal for the unpaid art project "Touch Sanitation" (1979-1980) at New York City's Department of Sanitation. Cultural affairs commissioner Bess Myerson, inspired by Ukeles, wrote to the sanitation department in 1985 proposing to expand artist residency programs to other government departments. Thirty years later in 2015, this finally gave birth to the "Public Artists in Residence (PAIR)" program. (Julia Weist, 2020; Mallory Nezam, 2022)

FIGURE 2. TAIWAN LEGAL ENTITY CLASSIFICATION CHART.

Source: Adapted from Executive Yuan Department of Personnel Administration official website.

Before analyzing specific challenges of each type, it's necessary to understand the common structural constraints facing Taiwan's public artist residencies. For institutions lacking juristic person status, they face two fundamental limitations:

First, regarding fundraising constraints, according to the Public Welfare Solicitation Act, "Government authority (institution) at each level may accept voluntary donations from its personnel or external members for public welfare purposes. However, it shall not solicit donations except in the case of a major disaster or international rescue." This legal restriction allows government departments only to passively accept donations but prevents active external fundraising for diversified financial planning. Active fundraising must be conducted through compliant entities such as third-party public legal persons, foundations, or associations.

Second, limited by public service system rules, they lack flexibility in personnel hiring. Insufficient staffing allocation frequently occurs, with institutions often needing to commission dispatch companies to recruit personnel. However, these employees receive different benefits from regular employees, and their direct supervisors are dispatch companies rather than art institutions, leading to professional identity and work continuity issues. These structural constraints manifest differently across governance models, discussed separately below:

Direct Government Management Type and Outsourced Management Type

Direct Government Management Type and Outsourced Management Type, due to their land source origins, can be said to inherit the thinking legacy of the 1990s "Adaptive Reuse of Unused Space" policy. These institutions often more closely resemble "Cultural and Creative Park" operation models, with artist residencies being merely one of many businesses. Notably, many parks later obtained cultural asset status, which, while helpful for space preservation, also increased operational restrictions and maintenance costs, making it easier to prioritize "park operations" over "support systems for artistic professional development"²⁷.

Direct Government Management Types such as the Kaohsiung City Government's The Pier-2 Art Center artist residency program and Tainan City Government's Soutlangh Cultural Park operation

²⁷ Supervisory agency representative C0104 observed: "Domestic imagination of artist villages sometimes still remains at an earlier concept: I want to revitalize an idle space, I want to create foot traffic. The way to create foot traffic is to bring in artists, put beautiful works there, and people will come." (Interview date: May 8, 2025)

program all apply for and receive subsidies from the Ministry of Culture's "Artist Village Operation Support Program Subsidies" as "municipal governments"²⁸. However, administrative agencies are constrained by public service system rules, lacking flexibility in accounting, finance, and procurement²⁹, with personnel mostly having administrative backgrounds and lacking professional knowledge in arts and international exchange. When the regularity of public service systems conflicts with the uncertainty of artistic creation, they face problems such as rigid budget allocation and cumbersome procurement procedures.

Facing these management challenges, some local governments choose outsourced management models to address insufficient professional personnel and complex administrative procedures. Outsourced Management Types such as the Art Site of Railway Warehouse in Hsinchu³⁰ commission artist residency operations to private organizations through contracts. However, performance-oriented contract management models easily neglect needs for artistic autonomy and professional development, potentially creating new problems.

Administrative Corporation Concurrent Operation Type and Other Institution Concurrent Operation Type

Administrative Corporation Concurrent Operation Type (such as WeR at National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, ADAM program at Taipei Performing Arts Center) and Other Institution Concurrent Operation Type (such as National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts residencies, New Taipei City Art Museum residency research) often adopt production-in-residence (PIR) models. Johan Pousette believes PIR types "tend to consist of professionals who contribute their theoretical, technical and financial expertise to the project" and can "create networks and local/international partnerships."

²⁸ According to the Ministry of Culture's "Subsidy Guidelines for Artist Village Operation Support Programs," direct municipalities and counties (cities) applying are not subject to the NT\$3 million upper limit and enjoy different subsidy ratios according to fiscal capacity levels. Tainan City and Kaohsiung City are both classified as third-level according to "Fiscal Capacity Levels of Direct Municipalities and Counties (Cities)," eligible for 80% subsidy of program expenses.

²⁹ According to the Executive Yuan Department of Personnel Administration, Administrative Legal Entity Section: "Due to constraints by laws and regulations such as the Civil Service Employment Act and Civil Service Remuneration Act, it is difficult to recruit appropriate talent," hence the need to establish administrative legal entities. Available at: <https://www.dgpa.gov.tw/mp/archive?uid=149&mid=148> [Accessed July 12, 2025]

³⁰ The outsourced management of Hsinchu Railway Art Village actually reflects structural changes in central policy. According to interviewee E0201's observation: "The central government doesn't want to do it. So they disbanded the entire Railway Arts Network. After disbanding, they returned it to Taiwan Railway, then Taiwan Railway requires local governments to rent from them, with Hsinchu being a good example," showing government's retreat from policy leader to simple space provider. (Interview date: March 26, 2025)

Taiwan's PIR programs are basically all concurrent operation type institutions, but artist residencies are only auxiliary businesses for these institutions, never priority items in resource allocation. Due to lack of openness and experimentality required for PIR, these institutions tend to incorporate resident artists into existing exhibition and performance planning frameworks, making it difficult to provide genuine creative autonomy spaces. Additionally, for Other Institution Concurrent Operation Type institutions lacking juristic person status, they still face the aforementioned fundraising and personnel allocation limitations, further restricting operational flexibility for artist residencies.

Government-Endowed Foundation Type

Government-Endowed Foundation Type, represented by Taipei Artist Village, falls under the Taipei Culture Foundation. The Foundation was established in 1985, officially defined as a "non-profit institution established by government endowment." Its establishment preceded the 1999 establishment of Taipei City's Department of Cultural Affairs, reflecting special historical context—institutional arrangements where foundations undertook cultural affairs in an era lacking dedicated cultural departments³¹. Taiwan only clarified legal status and supervisory mechanisms after the 2018 enactment of the Foundations Act³². This law simultaneously replaced the "Operation Directions for Administrative Supervision of Government-Donated Foundations," adopting distributed governance principles that divide supervisory responsibilities among various supervisory agencies.

Taipei Artist Village was initially directly operated by the Department of Cultural Affairs, then transferred several times before being commissioned to the transformed Taipei Culture Foundation. Its historical context and practical operations fundamentally differ from internationally common "public-private partnership foundation" models—the Taipei Culture Foundation has been government-funded and government-led since establishment, not a development path where private sector enterprises gained public subsidies due to high publicness. For example, France's *Cité*

³¹ In the 1970s, the Chiang Ching-kuo government promoted the "Local Cultural Center Establishment Plan" throughout Taiwan's counties and cities, led by the Ministry of Education, aiming to develop local culture, education, and artistic cultivation functions. Under the then-lack of legal basis for cultural departments, these cultural centers were often established under local education departments, information departments, or construction bureaus, with some assisted by government-endowed foundations. This institutionally laid the foundation for cultural foundations being established before cultural bureaus and embodied characteristics of "practical implementation before administrative system establishment" in Taiwan's cultural administration development process.

³² According to Article 2 of the Foundations Act, government-endowed foundations refer to "foundations meeting one of the following conditions: 1. Established by government agencies (institutions), public legal persons, or public enterprises with endowment property totaling more than 50% of the foundation's total fund" among other situations. Compared to privately-endowed foundations, government-endowed foundations (commonly called public-established foundations) are subject to stricter supervision and management.

Internationale des Arts is a private foundation recognized as "*fondation reconnue d'utilité publique*"³³, supported by diverse funding sources with a board composed of professionals³⁴.

In contrast, while Taipei Artist Village operates as a foundation, municipal government subsidies exceed 80% of its total income. Practical operations also demonstrate government over-intervention governance structure phenomena³⁵: municipal officials comprise over 1/4 of its board, and the supervisory board includes a representative from the government comptroller's office³⁶.

Relatively, Canada's Banff Centre demonstrates another governance model. This institution is a legal entity established under Alberta's Post-Secondary Learning Act, and while receiving long-term provincial government support³⁷, its board structure ensures high governance autonomy: the board consists of a chair and six public members appointed by the provincial government, plus nine members nominated by the board itself (with one recommended by the federal Minister of Culture), with the artistic director also appointed by the board. This institutional design allows Banff Centre to maintain professional subjectivity in arts education and creative support while receiving public sector resources, implementing the arm's length principle.

Community Repositioning: Chronotopes

³³ While receiving government subsidies, enjoying tax benefits, rights to accept donations and bequests, according to *CITÉ INTERNATIONALE DES ARTS Rapport d'activité*, income sources include residency service fees (19%), government operational subsidies (17%), commercial rent and cooperative income (18%), and self-raised income from venue rental, etc.

³⁴ Currently chaired by former Louvre director Henri Loyrette.

³⁵ Supervisory agency representative C0101 frankly acknowledges political pressure realities: "We are a public-established foundation receiving government subsidies. Your effectiveness isn't just accommodating artists. It's hard to convince councilors or city government that we need NT\$30 million annually to accommodate fifty artists. They ask where's the value? Where's the effectiveness? So we also need tourists to make this space known." (Interview date: January 7, 2025) Staff member B0103, while recognizing stability of government support, also points out problems like "monthly review of visitor numbers" and "dispersed core missions" stemming from this governance model, hoping "we have some autonomous capacity, that autonomous capacity being economic independence strength, allowing us to independently develop what we consider very important core missions." (Interview date: March 11, 2025) Another staff member B0102 hopes "for a mayor who truly values this area," this expectation for "enlightened rulers" policy thinking vastly differs from arm's length principle spirit emphasizing institutional guarantees. (Interview date: March 12, 2025)

³⁶ The Taipei Culture Foundation's 16th Term Board of Directors and Supervisors roster shows among 15 board members, 4 are municipal officials (including Department of Cultural Affairs director and deputy director), and among 3 supervisors, 1 comes from the municipal comptroller's office, with government representatives exceeding 1/4. Available at: <https://www.tcf.taipei/directors.aspx> [Accessed July 13, 2025].

³⁷ According to Banff Centre's official website, Banff receives funding from the Alberta government through Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, Alberta Infrastructure, and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Arts programs are supported by funding from the Government of Canada through the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canada Arts Training Fund. Available at: <https://www.banffcentre.ca/about-us> [Accessed July 13, 2025].

To better analyze Taiwan's artist residency current situations and possibilities, this study extends Pascal Gielen's chronotope theory framework. Gielen distinguishes fundamental differences between studios and residency spaces: studios provide "own-time" and "own-space," while artist residencies provide "social time" and "socially determined space" influenced by host institution and social expectations. Based on time and space interaction methods, Gielen proposes four chronotopes: "My Chronotope" emphasizing isolation and introspection, "Network Chronotope" valuing professional networks, "Alter-Chronotope" focusing on thematic research, and "Embedded Chronotope" deeply integrating with local communities. Different chronotopes reflect relationships between support systems and artists, transformations in artists' roles³⁸, changes in artistic methods, and determine institutions' community composition methods and developmental possibilities. As Andrea Fraser points out in institutional critique theory, "institution of art" includes not only physical organizations like museums and galleries but encompasses the entire social spectrum of the art field. Art's institutionality exists not only in organizational structures but is also internalized in art field participants' capabilities, conceptual models, and perceptual modes. Therefore, artist residency institutions' chronotope choices actually shape artists' creative conditions and social relations of art production, far exceeding simple space and funding provision.

Type of Chronotope	Definition	Case Examples	Author's Supplement
My Chronotope	Artists seek to transcend isolation and alienation from their daily creative work Typically located in remote rural areas Created for artists who wish to focus internally on exploration Pursuing individual sensations and deep self-excavation Artists' self-planning of time use, but time constraints still exist Simulating individual studios' "autonomous time" and "autonomous space"	Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida, USA Outlandia, Glen Nevis, Scotland	Provides sanctuary-like working space departing from daily labor protection (sanctuary-like working conditions), characterized by anti-social creative time
Network Chronotope	Typically located in urban centers with dense artistic networks	<i>Rijksakademie</i>, Amsterdam, Netherlands	Institutions accumulate social and cultural capital for participating

³⁸ Pousette believes many residency institutions still cling to Kantian discourse and romantic notions formed in the 19th century; however, art production is shifting from the "lonely genius" model derived from 19th-century romanticism toward more complex, diverse, and socially connected operational modes. "When thinking about residency institutions' potential for supporting artists interested in interactivity, social and political engagement, and working within social networks, a remote cabin isn't always the most suitable residency environment." (Pousette, 2011)

	Artists face "competitive pressure" from being watched by peers and critics Combines individual creation with social exposure, where artists must participate in activities Artists need to effectively utilize stationed time to establish reputation	PS1, New York, USA	artists, facilitating entry into art field networks and providing platforms for artist-institution symbiotic cultural capital
Alter- Chronotope	Emphasizes specific themes: science, ecology, social reform, technology, etc. Research value lies in proximity to "others" or different experiences Time spent by artists and interaction with "others," learning the knowledge they define Artists are not solely focused on personal exploration but on expanding content In neoliberal environments, such stationed projects easily gain financial support	Antarctic Research Station, Antarctica Keramis Ceramic Center, <i>La Louvière</i>, Belgium	Artists' self-scheduled time experiences meaning, expressing clients' "sense of place" through cross-temporal and multi-media experiences
Embedded Chronotope	Time and space are completely integrated, artists remain stationed long-term Creation becomes part of community life, deeply integrating with environmental conditions Artists and society, natural environment seamlessly integrate	The Land Foundation, Chiang Mai, Thailand	More closely approaches artists' settlements; author believes this chronotope type currently has deep interaction with wealthy local communities

TABLE 1. GIELEN'S ARTIST RESIDENCY "CHRONOTOPES".

Source: Author's compilation based on Gielen (2019).

Combining the above, while institutions may move within quadrants due to operational policy changes, based on social capital, human resource allocation, and institutions' historical relationships with different communities determined by establishment backgrounds, the author views chronotopes as feasibility indicators for institutional work visions and methods, creating the "Community Development Assessment Matrix" as shown below:

Community Model	Chronotypes as Working Methods			
	My Chronotope →Retreat, Self-reflection	Network Chronotope →Artistic Field Network Exposure	Alter-Chronotope →Cross-domain, Interdisciplinary Work	Embedded Chronotope →Integration and Formation of Communities
Academy and Salon Model	Low Difficulty Already have traditions of remote locations away from urban centers, easily providing sanctuary-like professional environments <i>Example: Banff Centre</i>	Most Suitable Institutions are already well-established professional art domain gatekeepers <i>Example: : Rijksakademie</i>	Moderate Difficulty Requires specialized source pools, but establishing cross-domain cooperation mechanisms is manageable	Structural Barriers Elite art development concepts are fundamentally incompatible with localism
Urban Cultural Strategy Model	Structural Barriers Institutions focus on establishing cultural relationships and promoting artist exchanges, inconsistent with retreat and self-reflection concepts	Low Difficulty Establishing external professional connections and expanding influence networks <i>Example: : Cité Internationale des Arts</i>	Most Suitable Institutions focus on individual artist development, lacking motivation to establish cross-domain cooperation mechanisms	High Difficulty Institutions positioned in international cultural exchange, with deep cultivation of community identity as their own goal
Artist Colonies Model	Most Suitable Typically focuses on artists' personal life development, providing independent space and undisturbed creative time <i>Example: MacDowell</i>	Low Difficulty Establishing external professional connections and expanding influence networks	Structural Barriers Establishing external professional connections and expanding influence networks	Moderate Difficulty Can be geographically integrated with communities, but individual creative work is not community development
Socially Engaged Model	Structural Barriers Contradicts institutional socially engaged missions	Structural Barriers Institutions serve specific community interests, with artistic network establishment lacking priority	Moderate Difficulty Artists' critical discourse maintains community presence with advocative power <i>Example: APG</i>	Most Suitable Completely aligns with institutional community intervention philosophy, easily gaining resource and policy support

FIGURE 3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT MATRIX.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on chronotope theory framework.

Governance Challenges of Taiwan's Artist Residencies: The Case of Taipei Artist Village

Despite being a municipally commissioned program, Taipei Artist Village has not gained space security. Under urban planning and land policy dominance, sites have been successively reclaimed, with only Treasure Hill surviving due to its cultural asset status. This shows that even when established by government funding, when institutions lack autonomy, they struggle to resist policy changes and urban development pressures.

Among the original three sites, Taipei Artist Village was closer to "Network Chronotope" mode, while Caoshan leaned toward "My Chronotope" mode. Currently, only Treasure Hill Artist Village remains. Treasure Hill was designed from the beginning with compound expectations: in addition to accommodating visiting artists, it included the "attic" serving as youth hostel functions (Chang, 2011), and "micro-loft" planning "for cultural and creative industry workers to apply for creative dining and creative shop spaces" (Taipei City Department of Cultural Affairs, 2012), primarily undertaking public service and entertainment functions. Now as the sole site, it must simultaneously bear multiple tasks

including artist residencies, tourism benefits, and community development, deviating from artist residencies' professional essence.

In fact, Treasure Hill's geographical location is unsuitable for commercial development, and contemporary Taipei already has two cultural and creative parks, reflecting Taipei's lack of clear differentiated division of labor among art spaces. Homogenization creates resource competition and functional overlap, also strengthening sectoral tendencies among institutions. Underlying causes partly trace to distributed governance principles adopted after the Foundations Act establishment. While this strengthened legal foundations, it also brought unclear responsibility attribution and inconsistent review standards. Especially in cultural and artistic fields, supervisory agencies generally lack professional backgrounds, making genuine professional autonomy difficult to implement.

Taking the "Annual Performance Evaluation Indicators for Outsourced Cultural Facilities Management and Operation Supervision, Taipei City Government Department of Cultural Affairs" as an example, this table is a product of distributed governance, reflecting operating teams' and supervisory agencies' understanding and practice of artist residency systems. However, the only indicator directly related to resident artists is "overall artist residency service satisfaction reaching 80%," listed alongside public service items such as "visitor numbers" and "educational outreach sessions." This reveals governance logic's excessive pursuit of instrumental value and neglect of cultural institutions' intrinsic value³⁹.

Moreover, while Taipei Artist Village has juristic person status, due to the municipal government being the primary funder and supervisor, simultaneously holding board and supervisory positions, it lacks appropriate arm's length principles. This leads to decision-making priorities favoring quantifiable benefits of tourism and activities⁴⁰ rather than artistic professional development⁴¹.

³⁹ The value triangle first proposed by John Holden categorizes art institutions' value dimensions into three: "intrinsic value," "instrumental value," and "institutional value."

⁴⁰ The "Annual Performance Evaluation Indicators for Outsourced Cultural Facilities Management and Operation Supervision, Taipei City Government Department of Cultural Affairs" requires annual "total visitor numbers reaching 300,000 or more," equivalent to 40% of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts' annual attendance. Staff member B0103 points out: "Treasure Hill is actually managed by two bureaus simultaneously, one is the Tourism Bureau, the other is the Department of Cultural Affairs," reflecting tension between tourism and artistic professional development goals. The interviewee further explains: "In monthly supervisory meetings at the Culture Foundation, all venues must report visitor numbers. If numbers drop, you must explain the reasons." This performance evaluation mechanism reflects supervisory agencies viewing visitor numbers as important indicators for measuring artist residency operational effectiveness, but artist residencies' core mission is providing artists with suitable creative environments, not serving as museums with collection and exhibition as primary functions. This performance orientation clearly deviates from artist residencies' professional essence.

⁴¹ Building on the above, supervisory agency representative C0104 also confirms: "Current Taipei Artist Village seems to be leaning somewhat toward tourism. Actually this phenomenon isn't only in Taipei... This leaning toward tourism, I think, is more commonly seen in artist villages with heavier public sector characteristics."

Conclusion: Community Repositioning Solution Pathways

Taiwan habitually uses "artist village" to refer to artist residency institutions, long influenced by "space activation" policies, with governance logic mostly starting from site utilization. The "Artist Village Operation Subsidy Regulations" since 2009 promulgation has defined artist villages as spatial concepts "planning and providing arts venues or idle spaces," with the 2024 revision finally emphasizing removal of idle space terminology⁴². While these policy vocabulary revisions show supervisory agencies' gradual attention to professionalism, public artist villages still face two fundamental challenges at institutional and operational levels: first, institutional defects in governance structures, and second, marginalization of cultural professionalism and community roles.

Institutional constraints stem from most artist residency institutions still relying on government commissioning and administrative supervision, lacking independence and stable funding sources to implement arm's length principles. In Taiwan, most public cultural institutions lack juristic person status, as subsidiary agencies under government systems unable to independently sign sponsorship contracts, open dedicated accounts, or issue tax-deductible donation receipts. Even with high publicness and professional capacity, they cannot develop fiscally autonomous strategies, making it difficult to maintain long-term goals and cultural missions during political transitions and policy shifts⁴³. Without breaking through institutional fiscal design limitations, any further innovative strategies and international connections will face structural constraints.

The urgency of community repositioning comes from artist residency institutions' vague understanding of their cultural roles and publicness. Taking Taipei Artist Village as an example, its performance evaluation indicators list "artist satisfaction" alongside "visitor numbers" and "educational outreach," simultaneously bearing multiple goals including tourism benefits, city image, and community participation, showing insufficient understanding of professional values and community relationships within the system, lacking capacity to establish long-term trust and

⁴² The 2024 "Artist Village Operation Support Program Guidelines" for the first time changed the description of artist residency site sources from "This guideline refers to artist villages as planning and providing arts venues or idle spaces as venues for various types of cultural-related talent to regularly reside, create, and exchange" to describing function: "This guideline refers to artist villages as arts venues that regularly organize domestic and international various types of cultural-related talent residency, creation, and exchange. Organizations responsible for artist village operations must have arts-related professional expertise or background and should provide relevant assistance and resources during talent residency periods."

⁴³ In early 2025, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan froze approximately NT\$ 3.4 billion of the Ministry of Culture's budget and additionally cut NT\$11 billion, affecting operational funding for institutions including national museums by about 30%. This raised concerns among cultural workers and academia about the high politicization of cultural budgets and the fragility of institutional sustainability. See: Taiwan Insight, "Taiwan's budget cuts limit Taiwanese cultural industries and its international voice," March 28, 2025.

cooperation with artists, residents, academia, and others. Therefore, this study recommends implementing support system transformation and reconstruction from the following five aspects:

Clarify legal positioning and governance autonomy: Promote juristic person status institutional foundations, enabling cultural institutions to legally establish accounts, accept donations, and design fiscal planning, thereby implementing the arm's length principle that "defends the cultural field, and especially the arts field, against improper political intervention" (Per Mangset, 2009).

Redesign performance evaluation mechanisms: Transform from quantity-based output measurement to diverse indicators emphasizing process quality, community interaction, and cultural contribution.

Implement professionally-oriented decision structures: Strengthen professional composition and independence of boards and administrative teams, ensuring artistic professionalism rather than administrative efficiency guides institutional operations.

Clarify historical and community contexts, assess social capital: Recognize potential of artist networks, local resident cultural practices, and academic resources as foundations for institutional positioning and cooperation.

Establish locally-based governance models: Design flexible and inclusive development pathways based on different communities' actual conditions, avoiding one-size-fits-all ideal templates.

Therefore, the real challenge may lie in whether supervisory agencies at all levels and implementing institutions possess willingness and capacity for transformation and institutional implementation. This avoids pursuing corporatization without establishing appropriate professional governance frameworks, instead making policies formalistic during implementation, lacking appropriate cultural judgment and public responsiveness. Taiwan should stop appropriating superficial forms from successful international cases and instead face institutional realities, developing contextually appropriate "chronotopes" based on existing foundations including artist networks, academic institutions, and local communities, gradually building relatively autonomous governance mechanisms. It is hoped that future public artist residencies can respond to substantial needs of artistic professionalism and local communities from the perspective of supporting artistic creation and public cultural practice, truly becoming intermediary roles connecting artists, policy, and communities, providing flexible and translation-capable operational platforms.

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The Dual Effects of China's Censorship System on Contemporary Art Creation: A Comparative Study Based on China and Europe

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ABSTRACT

The robust expansion of the contemporary art market in China, despite the pressures of censorship, highlights the complex nature of the censorship system, which cannot be simply characterized as mere "cultural despotism." In contrast to the balanced mechanisms found within the European judicial framework, the distinctiveness of Chinese censorship is marked by an unbalanced, administrative-led approach, where legislative ambiguity and the lack of procedural justice emerge as significant concerns. Nevertheless, the artistic expressions of Chinese creators have not diminished the diversity of artistic expression; rather, artists have innovatively reconstructed their modes of

Keywords:

Chinese
Censorship
Contemporary Art
Artistic Freedom

expression through strategic interventions, thereby enriching the contemporary art landscape and fostering a culture of innovation within constraints.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Introduction

Within the theoretical discourse surrounding freedom in contemporary art, China's censorship system is often oversimplified as a representation of "cultural despotism." Dominant scholarly narratives tend to emphasize the system's stringent control mechanisms, multifaceted restrictions on freedom of expression, and the opacity of its operational procedures, culminating in a critical framework that posits "institutional suppression of art." However, this perspective is limited by two significant oversights: first, the phenomenon of art censorship is a global issue. Reports from Freemuse on global artistic freedom have documented numerous instances of restricted artistic expression annually for decades, with democratic nations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany accounting for over 40% of these occurrences⁴⁴. Secondly, the contemporary art market in China has shown consistent growth, as evidenced by an increase in art exhibitions, heightened activity among professional galleries, greater diversity in artistic expression, and the rising visibility of avant-garde artists⁴⁵. This trend suggests a potential symbiotic relationship between regulation and innovation within the realm of Chinese contemporary art.

Indeed, the development of contemporary Chinese artists has consistently occurred alongside the imposition of censorship, which has adversely affected artistic creation by compelling some artists to emigrate or relegating certain works to underground or self-exiled status⁴⁶. Both external observers and media outlets frequently highlight the excessive constraints on artistic freedom within China's censorship framework, and many Chinese artists themselves acknowledge the challenging creative environment in their country. However, it is essential to recognize that the censorship system is fundamentally designed to delineate the parameters of artistic freedom, with its institutional intent not aimed at alleviating the suppression of artistic expression. Consequently, this paper seeks to transcend the binary opposition framework and, through a comparative analysis of China and Europe, elucidate that the uniqueness of Chinese censorship resides not in the degree of suppression but in its governance structure. The strategies employed by artists to navigate these constraints underscore a process of cross-cultural creative adaptation.

Methodology

⁴⁴ <https://www.freemuse.org/category/reports/freemuse-reports>, accessed at 10th July 2025.

⁴⁵ China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, 2023 *Annual Report on Art Development of China*, Beijing, China federation of literary and art circles publishing house, May 2025, 120p

⁴⁶ <https://www.artda.cn/yishushengtai-c-5108.html>, accessed at 10th July 2025.

This study employs a mixed-methods framework to systematically investigate the constraints and facilitative influences of content review systems on artistic production. The study utilizes a dual approach that includes comparative institutional analysis and structured questionnaire surveys. Initially, a comparative analysis is conducted using a control sample from China and Europe, focusing on legislative foundations, legal frameworks, and administrative systems to elucidate the unique characteristics of the Chinese review system. The analysis is organized around three key dimensions: institutional logic (state-led versus industry self-regulation), enforcement mechanisms (codified lists versus case law systems), and punitive measures (administrative intervention versus judicial litigation). By examining administrative practice cases, such as China's pre-approval system for exhibitions and Europe's post-event accountability frameworks, the study highlights the distinctive attributes of China's proactive review (preventive control) in contrast to Europe's reactive review (reactive redress).

Subsequently, an anonymous structured questionnaire survey was conducted in active art regions of China, utilizing stratified sampling techniques. This survey comprises 23 closed-ended questions, including a five-point Likert scale, as well as one open-ended question, designed to assess five critical dimensions: (1) awareness of the review system, (2) experiences with content modification, (3) coping strategies, (4) the impact of these strategies on creative freedom and innovation, and (5) the emergence of new technological experiments. The integration of these two components establishes a theoretical-empirical feedback loop that validates the effects of the content review system.

The distinctiveness of China's censorship

From the perspective of legislation

Europe recognizes artistic freedom as a fundamental right and has developed a relatively comprehensive framework of checks and balances concerning censorship. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has articulated the principle of proportionality in its jurisprudence, stipulating that any intervention must be both necessary and minimally harmful. For instance, in the case of *Kwantum v. Vitra*⁴⁷, the CJEU determined that EU member states are obligated to safeguard copyright for artistic works within their jurisdictions and are prohibited from imposing restrictions based on discrepancies in standards from the country of origin. While the legislative frameworks governing artistic freedom differ among member states, they generally establish a balanced approach to censorship (Zhang, 2011; Zhang, 2014). For example, Germany employs a dual system at both

⁴⁷ CJEU, Case C-227/23, *Kwantum v. Vitra*, EU:C:2024:844, para 52

federal and state levels, wherein the Federal Constitutional Court upholds artistic freedom, while state governments, such as those of Bavaria and Berlin, are permitted to formulate their own censorship guidelines (Shan & Liu, 2004). Nonetheless, federal courts retain the authority to overturn state court rulings, thereby ensuring a system of checks and balances (Wei, 2016).

In contrast, China lacks a definitive stance on artistic freedom. Article 47 of the Chinese Constitution includes "freedom of literary and artistic creation" within the broader category of "freedom of cultural activities," asserting that "the state encourages and assists citizens engaged in education, science, technology, literature, art, and other cultural undertakings that are beneficial to the people."⁴⁸ However, this article does not specify the exact nature of these rights or the principle of reservation (Qi, 2014). This provision reflects both the characteristics of freedom rights and social responsibilities and is frequently interpreted in China as a "cultural development right under state leadership," rather than as a protective right against public authority (DU, 2013). Consequently, China's censorship legislation primarily focuses on preserving the socialist system, ensuring national security, and maintaining social stability.

This study examines the distinct legal frameworks in Central Europe and acknowledges that concerns regarding scrutiny in China and Europe may differ significantly. For instance, Europe tends to prioritize issues related to religious ethics, historical contexts, and racial considerations in the realm of artistic censorship, whereas China is more focused on matters of national security and political content. Despite these differing priorities in censorship, a legal analysis reveals that both China and Europe impose limitations on artistic freedom. However, the European conception of the right to artistic freedom is characterized by a defensive stance against public authority, which provides a more definitive foundation for assessing whether a work is subject to censorship. In contrast, in China, the right to artistic freedom is framed as a mechanism of cultural governance under state control, resulting in a censorship system that prioritizes adherence to national cultural governance policies. This framework complicates the direct application of the right to contest artistic freedom in a straightforward manner.

From the perspective of governance

China's art censorship framework is characterized by significant legislative fragmentation and a focus on prior restraint. Within this governance structure, various administrative regulations simultaneously delineate lists of prohibited content, all cultural products need to be reviewed by the relevant administrative authorities before they can be made available to the public.. For instance, Article 25 of

⁴⁸ Constitution of the People's Republic of China art 47 (1982). National People's Congress. <https://en.npc.gov.cn.cdurl.cn>.

the "Regulations on the Administration of Publications" prohibits publications that contain seven specific types of content, including those that "endanger national security" and "incite ethnic hatred."⁴⁹ Similarly, Article 25 of the "Regulations on the Administration of Commercial Performances" imposes comparable political and moral restrictions on commercial performances⁵⁰. Additionally, the "Interim Regulations on the Administration of Internet Cultural Activities" require operators of online cultural products to obtain administrative licenses and comply with mandatory self-censorship requirements⁵¹. These requirements include the establishment of review mechanisms, real-time interception of violations, and reporting obligations. This legislative fragmentation is further organized by the "Management Measures for the Blacklist of Cultural Products (Trial)," which creates a preventive control network across various media⁵². In the face of an increasingly complex and developed internet environment, China has not lowered its requirements for per-approval. The "Interim Regulations on the Management of Internet Cultural Activities" explicitly classify internet art and similar forms as internet cultural products, which are subject to specific operational permits and content review requirements. Entities involved in providing internet art content must register with the cultural department within 30 days and prominently display their registration number. If these entities present unreviewed or non-compliant content during internet exhibitions or in digital art formats, cultural enforcement authorities are authorized to mandate the cessation of broadcasts and impose financial penalties. Additionally, in accordance with the "Regulations on the Administration of Publications," any graphic, audio, or video publications disseminated or sold online must obtain the necessary publishing and distribution licenses prior to release. For instance, online literature, internet videos, and digital art collections are prohibited from publication without the appropriate publishing license. Consequently, this model engenders two structural features: first, a conflict of regulatory hierarchies, wherein the coexistence of departmental rules and administrative regulations generates uncertainty in their application; second, an expansion of administrative authority, as cultural authorities exert substantial control over the entire process of creation and dissemination through licensing approvals (such as internet cultural operation licenses), thereby rendering censorship an essential prerequisite for content release.

In contrast, European Union member states typically establish a post-facto redress mechanism that prioritizes freedom of expression. This institutional framework is grounded in dual guarantees: on one hand, constitutional protections, exemplified by Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

⁴⁹ Publication Administration Regulation (promulgated by State Council, 2001, amended 2016), § 25.

⁵⁰ Regulation on Administration of Business Performances (promulgated by State Council, 2005, amended 2016), §25.

⁵¹ Interim Provisions on Internet Culture Management (Order No 51, Ministry of Culture, 2011, revised 2017), §16.

⁵² Measures for Administration of Blacklist of Cultural Products (For Trial Implementation) (promulgated by Ministry of Culture, 2016), §5.

and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, affirm that artistic expression is a fundamental right, with exceptions permitted only if they satisfy the criteria of "legal clarity," "necessity," and "proportionality." On the other hand, there exists a guarantee of judicial finality; for instance, Article 5 of the German Basic Law explicitly abolishes prior censorship, asserting that "artistic and academic freedom is inviolable," while the French "Law on Freedom of the Press of 1881" enshrines the principle that "publication does not require prior approval." In practice, restrictions are enforced solely through judicial adjudication: in Germany, the display of Nazi symbols or hate speech must be adjudicated by a criminal court⁵³, and in France, content that incites terrorism is prosecuted by ordinary courts under the Anti-Terrorism Law. The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, as illustrated in cases such as *Otto-Preminger-Institut v. Austria*⁵⁴, further reinforces the principle that "the state bears the burden of proof for intervention," necessitating that restrictive measures demonstrate an "urgent threat" to democratic society. This institutional design establishes a dual buffer of rights protection and judicial checks and balances, thereby strictly limiting censorship to a supplementary exception to freedom of expression.

From the perspective of administrative practice

In the context of administrative practices, the art review process in China is characterized by "multi-agency collaborative control" and "elastic standards," which result in considerable institutional expenses. Cultural authorities maintain primary rights of approval, such as the issuance of exhibition permits; however, various agencies—including public security departments (responsible for public order), fire safety authorities (focused on venue safety), and propaganda departments (charged with ideological oversight)—intervene in the review process, thereby creating a "sequential approval" system (King & Roberts, 2013). For instance, a non-state-owned art museum was required to establish a three-tier review mechanism that included "pre-review by the Party branch, re-examination by the district cultural and tourism bureau, and final review by the municipal propaganda department" following complaints regarding an installation that utilized historical metaphors. This procedural complexity resulted in an average exhibition duration of 117 days, as indicated in the "2020 Annual Report on Private Art Institutions in China," with 68% of that time dedicated to non-artistic administrative coordination. This phenomenon of "pan-politicized screening" gives rise to two significant challenges: first, the ambiguity surrounding review standards, as grassroots implementers expand the interpretation of vague terms such as "political issues" and "negative impacts," which compels institutions to engage in excessive self-censorship (as evidenced by a gallery pre-censoring

⁵³ Strafgesetzbuch [German Criminal Code] §130(4) (1985, amended 2005).

⁵⁴ ECHR, *Otto-Preminger-Institut v. Austria*, No. 13470/87, §48 (1994).

30% of its exhibited works to mitigate potential risks); second, the decentralization of responsibility, where overlapping powers and duties among cultural departments, public security, and propaganda agencies result in redundant reviews or conflicting directives (illustrated by a biennale that had to revise its curatorial plan twice due to delays in fire safety reviews). The essence of this system lies in the pervasive administrative entrenchment of power within the creative ecology, wherein artistic autonomy is subordinated to a risk-averse rationale.

In contrast, the member states of the European Union function within a framework characterized by "judicial finality" and "self-regulation," which results in a low-intervention enforcement model. When compared to the Chinese system, three primary advantages become evident. First, there is a simplification of administrative procedures. For instance, Article 14 of Germany's Assembly Act mandates that only large public events are required to submit safety plans to the police, without any stipulations for content review. The second advantage relates to the judicial resolution of disputes. In instances where a work incites social controversy (such as the refugee-themed performance art presented at the 2017 Berlin Biennale), ordinary courts adjudicate on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the Penal Code or Anti-Discrimination Law, as cultural administrative departments do not possess the authority to directly terminate exhibitions. The European Court of Human Rights, in the case of *Vereinigung Bildender Künstler v. Austria*, emphasized that if member states choose to intervene in artistic expression, they must demonstrate a "pressing social need."⁵⁵ The third advantage pertains to the establishment of industry buffering mechanisms. For example, the United Kingdom has implemented "Exhibition Ethics Guidelines" through the Arts Council, which empower gallery associations to independently address complaints. Additionally, the German Museums Association has created an "Ethics Review Committee" to supplant government pre-review processes, with only 3.2% of disputed cases being referred to the judiciary over the past decade, according to data from the Berlin Institute for Cultural Policy in 2021. This framework enables early legal risk assessment for artists during the creative process, thereby significantly reducing non-artistic compliance costs.

Strategies Artists Use to Respond to Censorship

The Adverse Consequences of the Censorship System: The Tendency Toward Self-Censorship

⁵⁵ ECtHR, *Vereinigung Bildender Künstler v. Austria*, No. 68354/01, §33 (2007).

The survey conducted with 32 artists, as previously stated, indicates that 78.1% of participants (25 individuals) perceive the censorship system as characterized by "ambiguity" or "unpredictability." This lack of clarity regarding the nature of the censorship they encounter, combined with the absence of transparent definitions concerning specific boundaries and enforcement criteria, contributes to their uncertainty. Notably, 62.5% (20 individuals) reported experiencing significant censorship interventions in their creative endeavors or exhibitions. All artists who encountered censorship indicated a tendency to preemptively adjust their creative direction in anticipation of censorship standards. This dynamic between "institutional uncertainty" and "behavioral anticipation" highlights how the mechanisms of censorship exert influence over self-regulation through implicit deterrence.

Among the respondents, 25 individuals reported employing at least one strategy of self-censorship in their creative processes. The most commonly utilized strategies included "reconstructing creative language" (20 individuals), "abstracting the content" (18 individuals), and "changing the exhibition venue or platform" (17 individuals). In assessing the effectiveness of these self-censorship strategies, 15 respondents articulated the perspective that the censorship system "seriously undermines the integrity of expression" or "necessitates significant compromise." Furthermore, 68.8% (22 individuals) asserted that self-censorship compromises the integrity of expression, necessitating substantial concessions on fundamental issues, while 53.1% (17 individuals) indicated that exhibition censorship directly compels considerable modifications, such as the removal or alteration of elements within their works. In the context of actual exhibitions, content censorship "significantly restricts free expression" or "necessitates adjustments to creative elements."

A significant number of participants, specifically 20 individuals, reported that following experiences of censorship, or even in the absence of direct censorship, they would take the initiative to refrain from creating content that they perceive may violate censorship criteria based on their own assessments. Additionally, another group of 20 individuals expressed their intention to alter their creative output to align with established censorship standards. In further discussions, 18 participants conveyed that these modifications impede the complete expression of their artistic work.

This indicates a considerable detriment to the framework of artistic expression as a result of censorship, wherein artists encounter scrutiny prior to exhibitions and harbor concerns regarding the potential censorship of their works during public display. Consequently, this engenders a pervasive culture of self-censorship and the alteration of their creative content throughout the artistic process, which is likely to culminate in a diminished diversity of artistic expression.

The Stimulus of the Censorship on Creativity

Conventional theories of censorship frequently conceptualize censorship mechanisms as singular instruments of cultural suppression, primarily emphasizing their role in limiting creative freedom. In contrast, Michel Foucault's analysis of the productive dimensions of power provides a significant reorientation for contemporary theories of censorship. This perspective, been called as "New Censorship Theory", suggests that the censorship system operates not solely as a constraining force but also as a catalyst for creativity, thereby reshaping the framework of artistic expression through the establishment of boundaries (Yao, 2019; Foucault, 2023; Kocur & Leung, 2012; Bunn, 2015).

This study, which is grounded in a comprehensive survey of 32 contemporary Chinese artists, demonstrates that the censorship system can stimulate artistic innovation through two primary mechanisms. By delineating the boundaries of the "expressible domain" and the "taboo domain," the censorship framework necessitates that artists develop complex systems of symbolic translation. The findings reveal that metaphorical coding has emerged as a predominant strategy, employed by 78.1% of the surveyed artists, who reconstruct symbolic representations through various material media to evade direct expression. For instance, Zhang Yibei's "Vase" series (2021) utilizes a "negative space" technique, incorporating perforations in porcelain to transform the obscuring effects of censorship into a visual representation, thereby articulating a critique of the system.

Furthermore, cross-media narratives function to alleviate sensitivity, as indicated by a mention rate of 62.5%. This enables artists to deconstruct sensitive content into various formats, such as installations, performances, and digital art. A prominent example of this is Xu Zhen's "Tianxia" series, which encases bricks from the Great Wall in supermarket packaging, thereby subverting overarching narratives of nationalism through the use of consumerist symbols.

Strategies that incorporate spatial transformation allow artists to navigate spatial constraints effectively. Notably, 31.2% of respondents reported utilizing a approach involves the online dissemination of AI-generated altered images while preserving core concepts in offline exhibitions, thereby establishing a flexible framework to circumvent censorship. Additionally, 21 respondents (65.6%) indicated that censorship fosters the development of private communication channels, which in turn reconstructs the dissemination process through private salons and collaborative exhibitions on international platforms. This finding resonates with Foucault's notion of "the topology of resistance within the gaps of power, exemplified by the "Apartment Project" in the 798 Art District. This initiative integrates exhibitions within private residences, thereby creating a fluid "non-institutional space."

A cohort of six artists who explicitly acknowledge that censorship can foster innovation highlights the increase in creativity that arises from challenges to established boundaries. Yue Minjun's "Laughing Man" series exemplifies this phenomenon by juxtaposing political symbols, such as those associated with Tiananmen, with absurdly smiling figures. This juxtaposition effectively parodies authoritative

discourse within the constraints of censorship. This "dance with shackles" has resulted in the development of a uniquely Chinese political pop grammar.

Conclusion

This study elucidates a previously obscured dialectical relationship within the realm of cultural governance by systematically comparing the censorship systems of China and Europe. It posits that while censorship serves to regulate artistic expression, it concurrently reshapes the avenues and modalities of artistic innovation through institutional pressures. The findings indicate that the distinctiveness of the Chinese censorship system does not stem from the absolute severity of its repressive measures; rather, it arises from the unique configuration of its institutional framework, enforcement mechanisms, and the strategies employed by artists in response. The principal findings can be encapsulated in three dimensions:

The first dimension concerns the convergence of institutional objectives alongside the diversity of practical models. While both China and Europe share the fundamental goal of ensuring cultural security, Europe adopts a legalized hierarchical framework—exemplified by France's distribution licensing system and the United Kingdom's age rating system—augmented by a comprehensive system of checks and balances, which includes judicial review and industry self-regulatory organizations. This framework facilitates predictable regulations and provides avenues for appeal. In contrast, China's censorship model, which is primarily administratively driven, is characterized by legislative gaps, a lack of procedural transparency, and the centralization of discretionary authority. These factors significantly increase compliance costs for artists. This distinction underscores the central inquiry presented in the introduction: the uniqueness of China's censorship does not reside solely in its existence as a common mechanism within global cultural governance, but rather in the structural implications of its institutionalized uncertainty on the artistic ecosystem.

The second finding underscores the dual-track nature of the repressive effects of the Chinese censorship system, which integrates explicit constraints with implicit production. The inherent ambiguity of the administrative censorship process in China has facilitated the rapid emergence of a metaphor production system. Artists engage in "compliant resistance" through various means, including symbolic recoding (as exemplified by Yue Minjun's political pop), spatial folding (evident in underground art communities), and technological mediation (such as AI-generated alternative content). These strategies collectively establish a distinctive local grammar for adapting to censorship. This phenomenon elucidates the paradox of the flourishing art industry mentioned in the introduction: when the pressures of censorship are transformed into innovative impetus, the art market experiences resilient growth through self-adjustment.

This article further elucidates the regional disparities in censorship systems through cross-national comparisons and challenges the binary narrative of "freedom-repression" in relation to the Chinese censorship system by examining the strategies employed by artists. It also addresses the sample bias associated with the "victim narrative" by investigating adaptive creation. Empirical research and case studies reveal that Chinese artists have developed highly sophisticated strategies for institutional negotiation, thereby actualizing Foucault's concept of "productive power" into individual coping mechanisms within the domain of cultural governance. The Chinese case exemplifies that artistic innovation can achieve significant advancements even in the face of institutional constraints. Cultural policymakers are encouraged to recognize the institutional adaptability of artists and to leverage this adaptability as a systemic asset for cultural innovation. Furthermore, China is advised to draw lessons from European legal frameworks to facilitate a transition of censorship from administrative discretion to the rule of law. The implementation of mechanisms such as graded censorship guidelines and artist appeal committees could alleviate the creative losses resulting from institutional uncertainty. As this study illustrates, the most stringent censorship may indeed give rise to the most profound symbolic revolutions. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the censorship system is contingent upon the dialectical interplay of power and creativity within specific historical contexts.

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Animating archives – creative research by an Asian diaspora art collective in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of socially engaged, arts-based research in regenerating public memory and decolonizing archival practices in Edmonton, Alberta. Through the collaborative project "Animating Archives Through Arts-Based Research", a collective of diasporic and racialized artists engaged with institutional archives and cultural memory to create new interdisciplinary artworks grounded in movement, music, ceramics, and oral histories. Drawing on the International Council on Archives' (2010) Universal Declaration on Archives, participatory action research, and Dasmohapatra's doctoral research on an emerging regenerative equity arts impact framework, this paper proposes a methodology for cultural policy that is community-rooted, grounded in creative research, and future-oriented..

Keywords:

Socially engaged arts, Social justice, Cultural policy

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the land, amiskwaciwâskahikan colonially known as Edmonton. A place long known, long cared for, long spoken to by the Indigenous nations of Canada, the Nêhiyawêwin (Cree), Saulteaux, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakota Sioux, and Dene peoples.

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Introduction

Canada is a Eurocentric settler colonial state, structured through the ongoing occupation and dispossession of Indigenous lands and the marginalization of Indigenous governance, laws, and cultural systems (Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Edmonton, located on Treaty 6 territory, is the traditional land of the Nêhiyawak (Cree), Saulteaux, Dene, Nakota Sioux, and Métis peoples. Although Treaty 6 was established as a nation-to-nation agreement (Miller, 2009), efforts toward reconciliation remain fraught, revealing ongoing tensions between institutional practices and the treaty's original intent (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In response, some organizations are beginning to engage in negotiated processes of reconciliation, seeking to build relationships with Indigenous communities through shared stewardship, cultural collaboration, and policy change that affirms Indigenous self-determination efforts reflected in initiatives such as the City of Edmonton's (2021) *Indigenous Framework*.

At the same time, Edmonton is home to a growing Asian diaspora shaped by successive migrations. Asians have been present in Canada since the late 1800s, with larger waves of migration occurring after the 1960s following the removal of racially based criteria from Canadian immigration policy (Li, 2003). South Asian, Chinese, and Filipino communities and the Asian diaspora as a whole are underrepresented in official archives, their complex and layered histories largely absent in mainstream archival and cultural institutions, and their cultural contributions often rendered invisible. These intertwined forms of erasure of Indigenous sovereignty and Asian diasporic presence limit how public memory and policy is constructed and whose stories are preserved.

The creative research project *Animating Archives* was conceived as an intervention into this gap. The project brought together artists from diverse cultural and creative backgrounds each weaving their

heritage into new works shaped by their primary research at the City of Edmonton Archives. The project was shared with the public through performances and an artist panel on May 12, 2025. During this event, the artists reflected on how their practices influenced by ancestral histories, and contemporary experiences in *amiskwaciwâskahikan* intersect with archival research. This paper documents the process of developing the arts-based methodology and the findings that emerged.

Background and Context

Cultural Policy and Archives

Canadian cultural policy has significantly shaped the landscape of archival practice, influencing not only what is preserved but also how cultural memory is constructed and accessed. Grounded historically in a nation-building agenda, federal and provincial policies have often prioritized official narratives aligned with settler colonial frameworks, thereby marginalizing Indigenous, racialized, and other historically excluded communities (Library and Archives Canada, 2019; Wyman, 2011). There are recent shifts such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Calls to Action, which led the Association of Canadian Archivists (2022) to put together a steering committee that produced the *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce*. These cultural policy shifts are prompting archival institutions to reassess their roles within the broader efforts toward cultural equity and diversification of records to reflect cultural memory and documentation of racialized communities. As such, Canadian cultural policy plays a dual role: it both constrains and creates possibilities for more inclusive, community-driven archival practices that recognize archives as dynamic sites of cultural rights and memory justice (Cifor & Gilliland, 2016).

The City of Edmonton Archives is the official repository for the administrative records of the municipality and also houses private records from local individuals, families, businesses, and organizations. In May 2023, Yong started as the community archivist, the first of its kind in municipal archives in Alberta. Yong's role is to actively reach out and to connect with communities that are unrepresented and underrepresented in the City of Edmonton Archives.

The community outreach and strategic planning work of the City of Edmonton Archives is guided by the Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA), developed by the International Council on Archives in 2010 and endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2011. Although the UDA is primarily a promotional and advocacy tool and is not intended to be a standard demanding compliance, it articulates core archival values and concepts (Eberhard & McEwan, 2011). The UDA connects archival access to fundamental human rights, including Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and Article 1 of UNESCO's (1945)

Constitution, which emphasize the right to information and the diffusion of knowledge (Roberto, Anderson & Crockett, 2021).

For Yong, UDA serves as an aspirational vision. A vision that casts archives as sites of collective memory where the past is preserved and accessed in the present for the future. The opening of the UDA states:

Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life. (International Council on Archives, 2010: 1)

While the UDA emphasizes the societal value of archives in preserving individual and community heritage, enhancing knowledge, and enriching quality of life (International Council on Archives, 2010), the tension is that these ideals are ones to strive after and may never be fully realized. Despite efforts to preserve and provide access to documentary heritage, significant gaps remain in what is preserved and who is served. Michelle Caswell (2014) describes these gaps and archival absence as "symbolic annihilation" (26), borrowing a concept used to describe the absence or misrepresentation of marginalized groups in mainstream media programming. In the context of archives, symbolic annihilation reflects a violence and erasure, in which active and thriving communities are treated as if they do not exist.

Asian Migration and the Diaspora

Asian migration to Edmonton began in the late 19th century, with early Chinese laborers arriving during the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Li, 1998). Politicians like Frank Oliver, the former Immigration Minister of Canada, wrote exclusionary immigration policies that banned immigration from Asia. This continues to impact the permanence of exclusion in governance and arts creation, crafting a history and presence that has preferred absence over belonging.

Policies targeting Asian migrants (Bakan & Dua, 2014), such as the Chinese Head Tax (Chinese Immigration Act, 1885) and the Continuous Journey Regulation (An Act to Amend the Immigration Act, 1908), are examples of restricted migration from Asia from the late 1800s to 1962. Post-1967 immigration reforms and the introduction of official multiculturalism in 1971 led to increased migration

from East, South, and Southeast Asia (Kymlicka, 2007). Despite this policy shift, Asian Canadians in Edmonton continue to encounter systemic marginalization.

A regenerative cultural policy must go beyond tokenistic multiculturalism to support equity-based approaches that situate racialized diasporic and Indigenous knowledges in conversation and collaboration (Dean, 2015; Goel, 2021).

Socially Engaged Arts and Social Justice

Socially engaged arts refer to artistic practices that are collaborative, participatory, and deeply rooted in community contexts. These forms of art often blur the boundaries between artist and audience, prioritizing co-creation, dialogue, and collective meaning-making (Helguera, 2011). In a regenerative cultural framework, socially engaged arts become tools for community healing, imagination, and a redistribution of cultural agency. Social justice, in this context, is not only an outcome but a process that challenges structural inequalities (such as settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and cultural exclusion) through artistic engagement (Bell & Desai, 2011). Socially engaged arts thus serve as a vehicle for justice, in which the cultural field becomes a site for reparation, resistance, and relational repair.

Cultural Policy and Regenerative Futures

Cultural policy encompasses the mechanisms (laws, funding models, institutions, and discourses) through which governments and cultural organizations support, regulate, and shape the arts and heritage sectors (Ahearne, 2009). Cultural policy in settler states like Canada often prioritizes Eurocentric art forms and institutional logics, marginalizing Indigenous, racialized, and grassroots cultural expressions (Sharma & Rhyne, 2016). Regenerative futures require a fundamental reorientation of cultural policy: from extractive models of support that serve elite institutions to reciprocal, place-based strategies that center Indigenous sovereignty, diasporic realities, and ecological sustainability (Chitty, Holmes & Prince, 2022). This means developing policies that not only distribute resources more equitably but also transform the governance of culture toward care, interdependence, and long-term cultural health.

Creative Research as Method and Praxis

Creative research is an inquiry approach that integrates artistic methods, such as performance, visual art, storytelling, or embodied practice, into knowledge production. It challenges dominant epistemologies by affirming aesthetic, emotional, and intuitive modes of understanding as legitimate (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Within regenerative cultural policy work, creative research offers a means to reimagine futures that are relational, situated, and co-produced with communities. It is particularly vital in contexts of cultural justice and decolonization, in which traditional research methods may replicate harm or exclusion. By foregrounding lived experience and community-led inquiry, creative research becomes both a method and a praxis for cultural managers and policymakers who seek to build futures grounded in equity, accountability, and imagination.

Research Question

How can socially engaged artists use archival research and creative practice to decolonize public memory and activate the cultural rights and regenerative futures outlined in the UDA?

This research explores how socially engaged artists can utilize archival research and creative practice to decolonize public memory and activate the cultural rights and regenerative futures envisioned in the UDA (International Council on Archives, 2010). Grounded in the recognition of archives as contested spaces shaped by settler colonial exclusions, the study positions archives not as neutral repositories but as political sites of cultural power. By framing archives as a cultural rights issue, the research emphasizes the need for equitable representation, access, and participation in shaping public memory. Through artist-led engagement, the project seeks to replace passive historical consumption with practices of reinterpretation, emotional resonance, and relational accountability.

Theoretical Framework

This project's theoretical framework is grounded in participatory, arts-based, and regenerative methodologies that treat the archive as a living, relational entity activated through creativity and community, rather than merely accessed or preserved. It calls for a return to quiet spaces and overlooked narratives, weaving memory, movement, and material to animate the untold. In this context, arts-based research (ABR) provides an effective and embodied approach to knowledge-making. Leavy (2015) argued ABR “creates space for multiple meanings through alternative forms of expression” challenging traditional hierarchies and legitimizing creativity as critical inquiry. Within this project, artists engaged Kathak, ceramics, music, spoken word, and Filipino folk dance to convey relationships and histories not accessible through conventional analysis.

Aligned with the UDA (International Council on Archives, 2010), the project frames archival engagement as a cultural right and a decolonial act. Artistic interventions make space for historically underrepresented communities to reinterpret and shape public memory on their own terms. This approach is not additive but transformative, reimagining archives as porous and emotionally resonant. The framework also draws on Dasmohapatra's doctoral research on Regenerative Equity, an arts impact framework that challenges extractive paradigms in cultural policy, creative research, and knowledge systems. Regenerative Equity emphasizes care, reciprocity, and cultural restoration, and centers long-term relationships, community-defined outcomes, and practices of slowness and interdependence as essential to both research and policy change (Dasmohapatra, forthcoming).

The Method is the Process

Within this framework, the method is the process. The research unfolds through art-making, conversation, movement, improvisation, and storytelling aligning with research-creation, a methodology that blurs the boundaries between knowledge production and artistic practice (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012). Rather than producing findings in the traditional sense, the work emerges through relational encounters with archival material, land, and community. This echoes Leavy's (2015) assertion that arts-based research is particularly powerful for surfacing marginalized voices and perspectives that resist textual capture. In this project, the process of weaving together voice, sound, body, and material becomes a method of historical redress, one that breathes life into the silences of the institutional record.

Reimagining the Archive

Ultimately, the Animating Archives project invites a reimagining of the archives as a generative and living space that can reflect the actual demographic, cultural, and emotional life of Edmonton's communities. Through participatory and artistic interventions, the archives is reconstituted as a site of potential: for healing, critique, and cultural continuity. This aligns with Michelle Caswell's (2016) notion of community archives, in which archival practices are grounded in the values, needs, and aesthetics of the communities they serve. In doing so, this research contributes to the development of regenerative cultural policy, one that not only repairs harm but cultivates new possibilities for equity, memory, and belonging through the language of art.

Methodological Approach

This research co-created an arts-based, participatory methodology rooted in regenerative and decolonial practices. Yong and Dasmohapatra recognized that conventional archival structures often fail to reflect the lived experiences of racialized communities, particularly Asian diasporas in Edmonton. In response, they developed alternative approaches to address archival gaps through creative expression and community engagement. Their framework positions artists as co-researchers, using artistic mediums to explore identity, memory, and belonging. This research-creation brought together three Asian women artists to engage with the City of Edmonton Archives through embodied, cultural, and artistic methodologies. The project convened Soni Dasmohapatra (South Asian Canadian, specializing in Kathak dance and ceramics), Jia Jia Yong (Chinese Canadian, composer and harpist), and Jeannine Naboye-Kroening (Filipino Canadian, folk dancer and choreographer), who each drew from their diasporic heritage to animate archival materials and generate new site-specific works.

Their process was observed and documented through visual and narrative inquiry by filmmaker Jordon Hon, a Chinese Canadian, whose practice serves to ethically witness and reflect cultural regeneration. Artists engaged in oral journaling, peer dialogue, and community discussion, producing affective data shaped by embodied memory. Audience feedback during public presentations was read relationally, not quantitatively, focusing on emotional insight and connection. The regenerative equity arts impact framework guided evaluation, emphasizing not only what was produced, but what was healed, transformed, and sustained through culturally grounded, community-led practice.

Results

As the artists were invited to engage with archival materials through arts and personal storytelling, they activated new relationships to memory and place and fostered dialogue around identity and the lived experiences of the Asian diaspora in Edmonton and beyond, disrupting traditional methods of historical interpretation. Soni Dasmohapatra's piece titled "From Earth to Rhythm: An Exploration of the Healing Arts of Story and Form" brought together Kathak dance, visual storytelling, and ceramics and positioned these mediums as tactile methods of archival research and cultural continuity. Jia Jia Yong's exploration was grounded in Teochew opera tradition from her Hakka background. Her piece "I was homesick for a home I never knew" combined recorded audio, spoken word, live harp performance, and ritual to bridge archival research, intergenerational memory, and trauma from her personal diaspora experiences. Jeannine Naboye-Kroening used dance as a dialogical tool in her piece "to be seen," staging archival silence through movement and live drumming, drawing on her memories of familial relations and cultural resilience.

Animating Archives Zine

The project published a zine that was distributed to participants and community members following the performance. As a knowledge mobilization strategy, zines offer an accessible, tactile, and relational form of disseminating research beyond academic or institutional spaces. Rooted in the DIY traditions of grassroots publishing, zines embody the principles of arts-based research by privileging voice, creativity, and multiplicity of meaning (Leavy, 2015). The zine *Animating Archives: Exploring What We Did Not Find* weaves together visuals, artist reflections, archival fragments, and community responses, functioning both as a record of the process and a living invitation for others to engage. Unlike formal publications, the zine fosters reciprocity and emotional resonance, enabling non-academic audiences, particularly diasporic and racialized communities to see themselves reflected in the narrative.

From a regenerative equity perspective, the zine acts as a cultural seed: it circulates stories that have been silent, nurtures intergenerational knowledge sharing, and builds ongoing relationships through its distribution. In doing so, it contributes to a regenerative cultural ecology where knowledge is not only transmitted, but felt, shared, and grown in community.

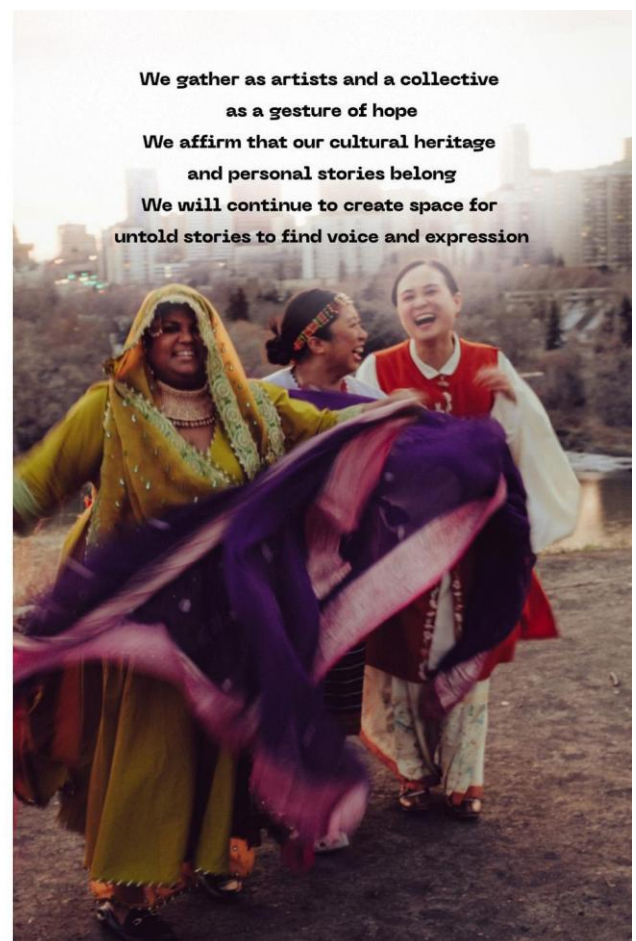
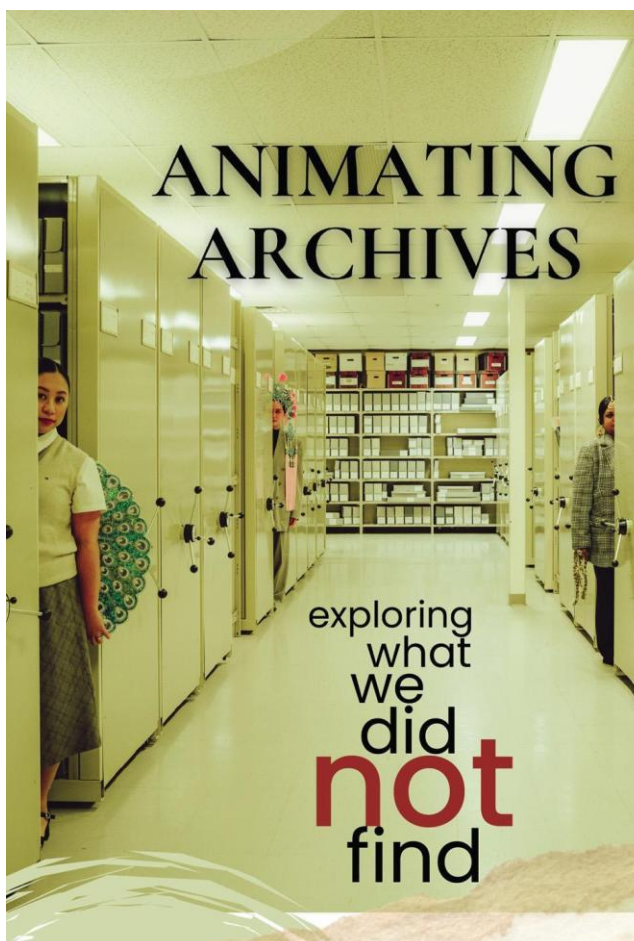


FIGURE 1. *ANIMATING ARCHIVES* ZINE FRONT COVER (LEFT) AND BACK COVER (RIGHT).

Source: Dasmohapatra and Yong.

Audience Engagement

In the reflections shared by the audience of the Animating Archives performance, audience members consistently gave positive feedback on the effectiveness and emotional impact of an arts-based method to reflect archival research:

It was a most honest, vulnerable and profoundly deep connection with one's heritage. It brought history to life (...) It is amazing how artistic and creative the performances were. I have been to archives but this is an extraordinary way to convey the message of memory presentation.

Really inspired by the form of the presentation. Art, history, movement, personal story – ignoring compartments and blending them all as one (just like we are as people!)

Through the performances, the audience also brought themselves to critically connect the themes of the absences and gaps in the archives to the presence and physicality of Asian artists performing live in the space:

The multi-sensory elements that combined to take back/up space in the archives. The sounds, reverberations, incense, visuals, reclaimed histories while literally leaving an impact on the archival space.

Archives as we know them are a very colonial tool to record but also erase histories. Watching you all perform and my own experience growing up in a culturally diverse community. Our archives are recorded differently and these records should find their way on our own terms. Beautiful performance.

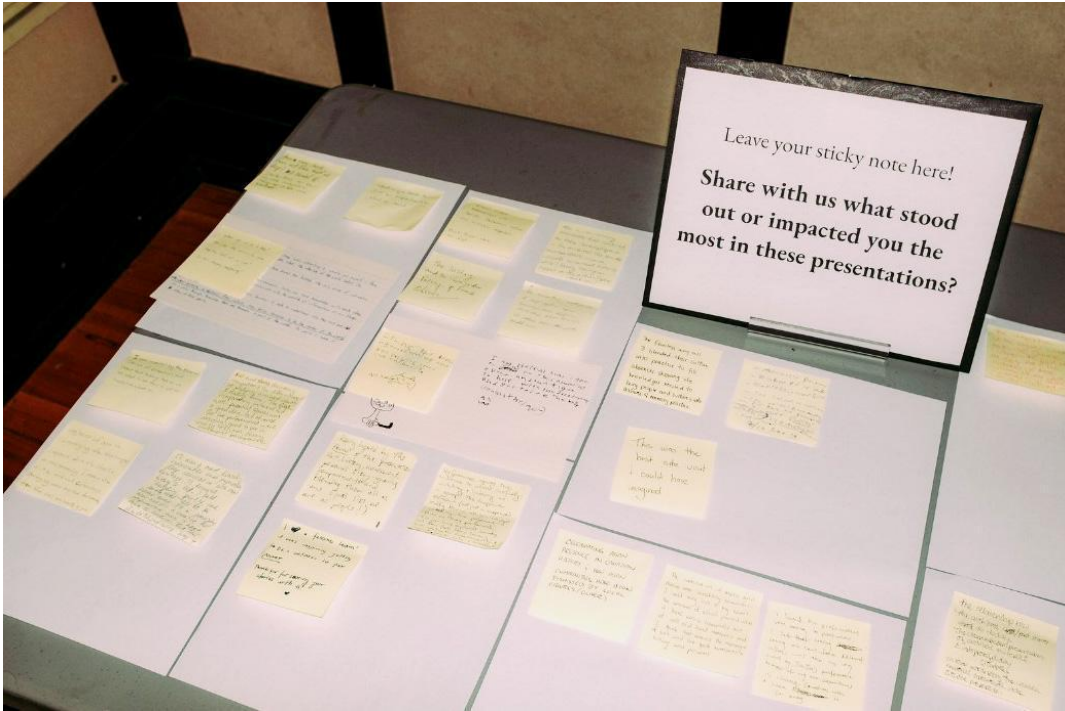


FIGURE 2. AUDIENCE FEEDBACK GATHERED AT THE ANIMATING ARCHIVES PERFORMANCE.

Source: Dasmohapatra and Yong.

Artist Reflections

The artists were also deeply impacted, as their creative works centered on themes that were emotional and personal. Their explorations stemmed from a shared grief at the absence of their community's lived experiences in the archives, but also moved towards a hopefulness of what a future of being included meant and could look like. In their introductions in the *Animating Archives* zine, the artists each contemplate the artistic, personal, and collective impact of their explorations:

Soni Dasmohapatra: All healing connects back to the land, elements and nature. I move to remember. I dance to return. My artistic practice lives at the meeting place of story and silence. Where breath, rhythm, and gesture hold the things words can't carry. Kathak, a classical dance form of India, has been both a home and a compass for me, a way to stay connected to ancestral memory while making sense of the present. I am interested in how art can hold space for grief and joy, for rupture and repair, and for all the quiet in-between moments that shape who we are. Through each performance, I invite the body to speak first, to trace the lines of history, healing, and becoming.

Jia Jia Yong: "Each of us are just trying to find our own ways to connect with our heritage," I said when our documentarian Jordon inquired about my thoughts on this project back in January. As

someone of Chinese descent born in Malaysia and raised in Canada, I feel I could not be further removed from my heritage and how to find my way. Although I rarely cover such personal themes in my artistic works, our project was intentional about creating space for these explorations and struggles and I am so grateful for that. "I was homesick for a home I never knew" was born from guilt, from yearning, from hope. And the belief that this expression in itself is my connection with my heritage—who I am and how I belong in this world. And that is enough.

Jeannine Naboye-Kroening: As an adult and artist navigating my practice, I have noticed the underlying themes of childhood, family, and culture. Finding absence in the archives in representation has led me to explore the loudness of silence in the archives. It was only when I found a poster in the archives of Karilagan Dance Society's first Hiyas (Gem) Awards in 1996 celebrating Filipino excellence in the community. Now in 2025, Karilagan is celebrating its 54th anniversary and 27th year of the Hiyas (Gem) Awards. There have been so many Filipino-Canadians that have been honored and recognized for their accomplishments. Finding that poster in the archives was a small win of representation and history, and in my piece, this is an opportunity to celebrate that.

These embodied encounters sparked new community conversations and inspired the formation of a new interdisciplinary artist collective, Ember, composed of the project's lead artists. Ember collective will continue this regenerative equity creative practice as part of a local arts residency with the organization Mile Zero Dance in May 2026, further embedding the project's decolonial and relational ethos into Edmonton's cultural landscape.



FIGURE 3. CO-CREATIVE PERFORMANCE WITH ALL PARTICIPATING ARTISTS, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: JEANNINE NABOYE-KROENING, JIA JIA YONG, AND SONI DASMOHAPATRA.

Source: Dasmohapatra and Yong.

Conclusion: Toward Regenerative Cultural Policy Futures

Animating Archives contributes to emergent discourses on regenerative cultural policy by demonstrating how diasporic and Indigenous-informed artistic research can reframe civic archives not just as record-keepers, but as sites for justice, creativity, and community restoration. It calls for institutional shifts in how we define, preserve, and circulate history, arguing for the inclusion of artistic methods in archival research and cultural governance, and to consider how cultural policy and memory work can become regenerative civic processes.

Through participatory, interdisciplinary arts practice, archives become active sites of story, resistance, and future-making. Archives are not just static repositories, but living materials to be felt, embodied, and transformed. By connecting ancestral, local, personal, and communal histories, the project offers a living model of how cultural policy can honor complexity and foster repair. This is what it means to

animate the archives to breathe life into the unspoken, to make visible what has been silenced, and to imagine a future that is not only inclusive but regenerative.

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Promoting Music Literacy through Territorial Networks: a Strategy for Developing a Widespread Musical Culture in the Emilia-Romagna Region

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ABSTRACT

The region of Emilia-Romagna has long stood out for its solid and consistent cultural policies, particularly in support of the music sector. This commitment was reinforced by the enactment of Regional Law No. 2/2018 (*“Norme in materia di sviluppo del settore musicale”*), the only Italian regional legislation exclusively dedicated to the music sector. Following a brief contextualization of the law, this contribution concentrates on Article 5, “Qualification of Musical Literacy”, and examines how this provision has been implemented. Drawing on data from the three triennial cycles (2018–2026), it investigates how this legislation has promoted access to music literacy by encouraging collaboration among local organisations. In particular, it analyses the role of Temporary Groupings of Organisations (RTOs), partnerships formed to implement educational projects across the region..

Keywords:

Regional cultural policies, Emilia-Romagna, Regional networks, Music education, Music literacy

Introduction: Emilia-Romagna Policies on Music

Emilia-Romagna Region has long stood out in the national panorama for its dynamic music scene and the consistent commitment of its public administration to supporting the sector's development.⁵⁶ Over the years, regional funding has encompassed the diverse domains of the local music industry, from education to production, live performances, and festivals of any genre. Since 1999, Regional Law n. 13 ("Standards in the Field of Entertainment", "*Norme in materia di spettacolo*") has sustained music alongside other performing arts, allocating resources to operatic, symphonic, and chamber repertoires, as well as to rock, pop, world music festivals and jazz, soul, blues ensembles. Moreover, music performance benefitted from Regional Law n. 37/1994 ("Standards for Cultural Promotion", "*Norme in materia di promozione culturale*", later replaced by regional law n. 21/2023).⁵⁷ Both 13/1999 and 37/1994 laws also addressed education, embracing music schools, choirs, and community wind bands; additionally, since 2015 the Region offered funding to music schools included in the regional register for the realisation of "projects aimed at fostering basic music education with the following characteristics: a) ensemble music; b) collaboration with educational institutions; c) inclusiveness" (regional law 30 June 2003, n. 12, article 25-bis, para. 1).⁵⁸

The enactment of Regional Law n. 2/2018 ("Regulations for the Development of the Music Sector", "*Norme in materia di sviluppo del settore musicale*") reaffirmed and further enhanced this commitment. The new regulatory framework considers the entire field, acknowledging it as a significant driver of economic, social and employment growth and aiming to nurturing a widespread musical culture across its territory. It was the first and remains the only Italian regional legislation exclusively dedicated to music and notable for establishing a central body in charge of its management: the Emilia-Romagna Music Commission.

The law is grounded in the recognition of music as a fundamental tool for civic education, a vehicle for social inclusion, and a strategic asset for the local economic development (Art. 1, para. 1). This

⁵⁶ The Italian public administration is characterised by a high degree of pluralism – of actors, levels of government, organisational models, public interests, and legal instruments. It consists of a plurality of entities distributed across multiple tiers of government. The three main political and territorial public authorities – State, Regions, and Municipalities – are governed by democratically elected bodies. While the State retains sovereignty, it grants political autonomy to Regions and Municipalities, allowing them to take independent political decisions. Regions, in particular, enjoy a significant degree of autonomy, including the power to legislate within their competences.

⁵⁷ Regional law 28 December 2023, n. 2 "New Regulations on Cultural Promotion. Repeal of Regional Law 22 August 1994, n. 37 (Regulations on Cultural Promotion)", "*Nuove norme in materia di promozione culturale. Abrogazione della legge regionale 22 agosto 1994, n. 37 (Norme in materia di promozione culturale)*".

⁵⁸ Article 25-bis ("Interventions for the promotion of music education in Emilia-Romagna", "*Interventi per la promozione dell'educazione musicale in Emilia-Romagna*"), was added to Regional Law 30 June 2003, n. 12 by Regional Law 21 October 2015, n. 17 ("Provisions related to the Adjustment Law and the general Measure for the Variation of the Budget forecast of the Emilia-Romagna Region for the 2015 financial Year and the multi-level Budget 2015-2017", "*Disposizioni collegate alla legge di assestamento ed al provvedimento generale di variazione del bilancio di previsione della Regione Emilia-Romagna per l'esercizio finanziario 2015 e del bilancio pluriennale 2015-2017*") and then repealed by regional law 16 March 2018, n. 2.

premise underlines the need to regulate the sector independently of other performing arts, while adopting a transversal approach that embraces its various components. The legislative text was therefore structured from a supply chain perspective, with provisions that span multiple levels: on the one hand it addresses education and training, from basic music education (Articles 3, 4, 5) to technical and professional skills that lead to qualified employment (Article 6); on the other hand, it supports entrepreneurship (Article 7) and the production, promotion, and circulation of contemporary artists and creativity (Articles 8, 8 bis, and 8 ter).⁵⁹

Chapter 2: “Qualification of the Educational Offer” (*“Qualificazione dell’offerta educativa e formativa”*)

Music literacy is given specific attention in the second chapter of the norm, titled “Qualification of the educational offer”. This section is divided into two main areas of intervention. The first concerns the qualification of the educational system through funding for activities implemented by music schools in partnership with territorial public schools (Article 3). The second line of financing promotes the dissemination of music literacy through music schools, community wind bands, and choirs (Article 5).⁶⁰

The overall objective of Article 5, entitled “Music literacy qualification” (*“Qualificazione dell’alfabetizzazione musicale”*) is to cultivate a pervasive, multifaceted, and inclusive musical culture that fosters intercultural dialogue. This ambition is pursued through triennial calls for projects focused on music literacy. The proposals may include individual music lessons, ensemble playing, and listening education programs, and they can be directed towards audiences of all ages. In addition, the call offers grants for so-called “system-wide actions”, that is, training of teachers and professionals in the field.

⁵⁹ Operatic, symphonic, and chamber music remains administrated under regional law 5 July 1999, n. 13, along with the other performing arts.

⁶⁰ In between them, Article 4 refers to the regional index of music schools, which was introduced in 2010 as a tool to ensure the quality of teaching supported by public funding. This Article entrusts the Regional Executive with the task of defining the standards and procedures for managing the register. The admission criteria were firstly established in 2009 by Regional Executive Resolution n. 2254 and revised the following year by Regional Executive Resolution n. 2184. After the enactment of regional law n. 2/2018, the requirements were further updated by Resolution n. 1291 (2018), which also opened the application process for the 2018-2019 school year.

Recognition, which must be renewed annually, is based on criteria concerning both the organisational structure (e.g. the presence of a statute, the availability of instruments for students, and the adequacy of the facilities) and teaching quality. The latter includes the qualifications of teaching staff, the assurance of continuity in instruction, the provision of workshops and ensemble activities, and the implementation of inclusive teaching practices.

According to Article 5, eligibility for these benefits is restricted either to associations or to Temporary Groupings of Organisations (RTOs) of music schools or entities, specialised in music education and practice.⁶¹ Applications submitted by individual associations or schools are therefore excluded. While this restriction may appear limiting, it is in fact intended to reinforce the systemic approach introduced by the law, and to guarantee its integrated and coordinated fulfilment across the region. The objective of collaboration among local actors is designed to stimulate the circulation of knowledge, the exchange of best practices and expertise, and the activation of virtuous circles. In these partnerships, stronger organisations can sustain weaker ones, particularly with regard to administrative and managerial capacities. As such, the obligation may produce especially positive outcomes for more fragile actors, by virtue of the opportunity to participate in a cooperative framework.

The Associations that received funding during the first two three-year-cycles (2018-2020 and 2021-2023) and the current one (2024-2026) were already composed of multiple entities and accustomed to operating within well-established networks extended over the entire Emilia-Romagna territory.⁶² The present contribution will therefore concentrate on RTOs, as it is within the context of temporary groupings that the potential of the measure becomes more clearly evident.

The Temporary Groupings of Organisations (RTO)

The positive impact of this strategy can be observed in the increasing number of both Temporary Grouping of Organisations (RTOs) and their participating members over the three cycles of the law. Following the 2018-2020 call, only two groupings were funded, rising to four in both the 2021-2023 and the 2024-2026 cycles. The number of participating entities grew from only six, to fifteen, and then to eighteen. Another parameter that has shown steady growth since 2018 is the number of municipalities involved in the groupings, reflecting a progressively more interconnected and reticular presence across the regional territory (see table n. 1 and graph n. 1). Moreover, the number of municipalities where the projects actually took place is normally higher than the number of official headquarters, as they often extend to neighbouring areas - in the current triennium, for instance, the number rises to twenty. A direct consequence of this expansion is the increasing number of the reached population: considering the beneficiaries on the whole (music schools, choirs, and

⁶¹ The acronym RTO stands for *Raggruppamento temporaneo di organismi*, whose literal translation in english is Temporary Grouping of Organisations.

⁶² Associazione Assonanza ETS, which has always received funding both on music schools and community wind bands, and Associazione Emiliano-Romagnola Cori (AERCO) APS.

community wind bands), a total of 13.930 participants were recorded in 2018-2019, 11.182 in 2019-2020, 14.755 in 2021, 16.690 in 2022, and 16.737 in 2023.⁶³

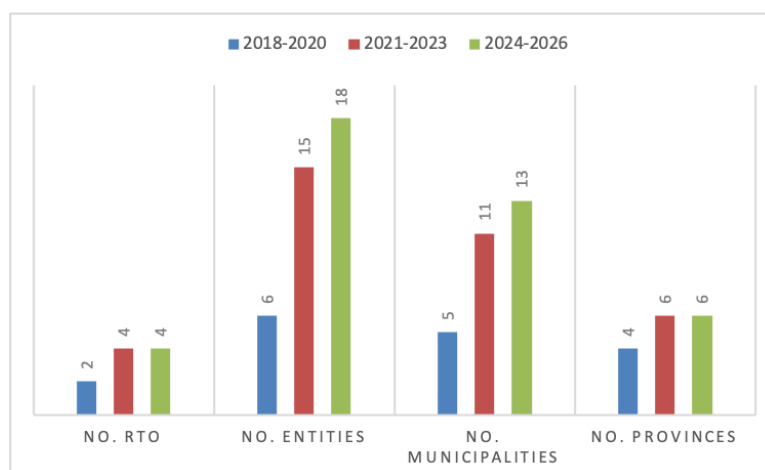
Triennium	RTO / Lead entity	Total no. of entities	Headquarters of RTO members	
			Municipalities	Provinces
2018–2020	Ensemble Mariani soc. coop.	3	Lugo, Ravenna	Ravenna
	CEMI	3	Bologna, Cesena, Rimini	Bologna, Forlì-Cesena, Rimini
2021–2023	Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio	3	Bologna, Valsamoggia	Bologna
	Senzaspine APS	5	Bologna, Argenta, Cesenatico, Soliera, Reggio Emilia	Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena, Modena, Reggio Emilia
	Fondazione Teatro Rossini	4	Ravenna, Lugo	Ravenna
	Il Temporale APS	3	Bentivoglio, Dozza, San Giorgio di Piano	Bologna
2024–2026	Ensemble Mariani soc. coop.	4	Lugo, Ravenna	Ravenna
	Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio	5	Bologna, Valsamoggia, Vignola	Bologna, Modena
	Senzaspine APS	6	Bologna, Argenta, Riva del Po, Cesenatico, Soliera, Reggio Emilia	Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena, Modena, Reggio Emilia
	Il Temporale APS	3	Bentivoglio, Dozza, San Giorgio di Piano	Bologna

TABLE 1. TEMPORARY GROUPINGS OF ORGANISATIONS FUNDED SINCE 2018, THEIR ENTITIES AND TERRITORIAL HEADQUARTERS.⁶⁴

⁶³ It is important to note that the first three-year cycle was administrated according to the school year, while from 2021 onwards the system transitioned to the calendar year, and that the 2018-2019 figure includes the final months of the previous school year (2017-2018). The slight decline observed in 2019-2020 can be attributed to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶⁴ For the RTO led by Fondazione Teatro Rossini in 2021-2023, I have considered four entities, unlike what is stated in Regional Executive Resolution no. 2485/2021. This choice was made for consistency with the following cycle (2024–2026), in which the entity “Angelo Pescarini Scuola Arti e Mestieri” is counted as two separate subjects - one for the Rossini school in Cervia and one for the Sarti school in Faenza.

Source: Regional Executive Resolutions 2196/2018, 1784/2021, 24845/2021, 1536/2024, 23707/2024, 23494/2024, and funded projects.⁶⁵



GRAPH 1. INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF GROUPINGS, ENTITIES, MUNICIPALITIES AND PROVINCES.

Source: Regional Executive Resolutions 2196/2018, 1784/2021, 24845/2021, 1536/2024, 23707/2024, 23494/2024 and funded projects

The analysis will now concentrate on the last two three-year cycles (2021-2023 and 2024-2026), considering in particular the current one. Although still ongoing, the 2024-2026 cycle serves as a key

⁶⁵ The funded projects are available on the Emilia-Romagna Region's official website, under the "Transparent Administration" section.

point of reference because it is the most substantial in terms of number of participating entities, variety of proposals and distribution across Emilia-Romagna. Additionally, the administrative procedures have reached a higher level of completeness and accuracy, allowing for a more precise and reliable data collection.

In 2024 the same four RTO as the previous cycle were assigned funding through regional law n. 2/2018, Article 5 (see table 1).⁶⁶ Their projects cover all the typologies of activity indicated in the call (individual and ensemble teaching, listening education), however with an emphasis on instrumental practice:⁶⁷ Ensemble Mariani has focused on educational workshops in schools aimed at introducing students to the basic elements of music, alongside ensemble performance, concert series, and international exchange occasions; Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio has realised a wide-ranging programme that includes guided listening sessions, lecture-concerts, and music workshops; they tailored to different age groups, from early childhood to adolescents, adults, and the elderly – with a specific attention to inclusion. Senzaspine has developed proposals involving people with disabilities, ensemble practice for children and adolescents, and initiatives of classical music dissemination; the RTO led by Il Temporale has combined local cultural promotion and international outreach both through ensemble music and a festival dedicated to the ocarina.

In this context, each Temporary Grouping of Organisations (RTO) has approached the idea of networking and territorial distribution in different ways. The RTO lead by Senzaspine, that operates in the areas of Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, and Bologna, has chosen to create region-wide networks, connecting different provinces. The strength of this model lies in its truly regional scope: the action spreads across a wide area, bringing the objectives of the law to diverse local contexts. However, a limitation of this view is the relatively weak integration among the activities, as they tend to remain specific to the local reality, with limited interaction between them. The three principal projects realised since 2021⁶⁸ share common premises, intents, and objectives, yet there is an absence of direct dialogue between them. Instead, each initiative responds to the peculiar needs of the local context in

⁶⁶ Note that Fondazione Teatro Rossini and Ensemble Mariani soc. oop. are part of the same Temporary Grouping of Organisations (RTO), which alternated the lead entity from one cycle to the next.

⁶⁷ All submitted proposals must pursue at least one of the following objectives: “a) qualifying and encouraging music literacy activities, including instrument teaching, and listening education with an inclusive character; b) promoting ensemble music, through concerts, festivals, competitions, and exhibitions; c) ensuring opportunities for young people involved in ensemble music training to participate in regional, national and international performance experiences aimed at developing multidisciplinary and intercultural approaches”, Regional Executive Resolution 518/2024. The reference to “listening education” is a distinctive feature of regional law n. 2/2018, promoted since its objectives (Article 1) and not mentioned in any other regional legislation in Italy. The reference to this educational methodology (La Face, 2006) underscores the importance of equipping the population with the foundational skills needed to become conscious listeners – a key goal to foster active participation to the regional musical offerings, that would have direct consequences on the entire sector. However, this aspect appears often undervalued in the actual selected projects.

⁶⁸ Since 2022, the initial three activities were expanded to six, with the introduction of concerts both in Bologna and in Reggio Emilia, as well as summer camps in Bologna.

which it takes place. In this regard, the advantages of the network appear to lie mainly in the capacity to broaden the regional educational offer and to support the improvement of locally relevant projects. Nevertheless, these do not evolve into a structured and integrated educational network.

All the other RTOs, have instead worked in a more granular way, focusing on a smaller, well-defined area (often within one Province only). The advantage of this choice is the proximity to the territory, with the capacity to effectively cover a certain zone, while the disadvantage is the narrower geographical scope and the more localized nature of the network. A particularly illustrative case of this approach is that of Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio and the RTO that it leads.⁶⁹ They operate in the peripheral areas surrounding Bologna's city centre and the marginal or pre-Appennine areas of the Metropolitan City of Bologna. Starting from the 2024-2026 cycle, the network included the Province of Modena: however remaining within the same regional sub-area, as the newly involved municipality of Vignola is located just a few kilometers from their headquarter (Valsamoggia), this RTO still represents an example of continuous expansion, progressively extending its reach by involving more organisations, municipalities, and even an additional province, while maintaining strong territorial cohesion. Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio opted to establish a network of music schools committed to engaging in mutual dialogue and fulfil coordinated activities, both in line with the call and among the participating members themselves. In some cases, this collaboration has included the sharing of teaching staff and professionals across schools. During the planning phase, the components of the RTO engaged in collective reflection and discussion, identifying a pre-existing coherence in what each of them was independently conducting. Based on this observation, they agreed to use the opportunity offered by the regional call to expand and harmonise their programming: the goal was for each of them to progressively carry out the full range of proposals within the network, in order to ensure that, over time, all participating organisations would be able to provide the same diverse and articulated offer. This attitude was seen as a way to consolidate the collaborative nature of the network and enhance the systemic impact of the funded interventions.

To sum up, both described models bring valuable contributions to the regional strategy: wide-reaching partnerships strengthens the regional coverage, whereas proximity allows more coordination and local impact on a specific area. Ideally, the progressive merging of these approaches should be encouraged – for example, through the regional calls for projects – in order to reach a fine level of local granularity within the broader frame of a regional network.

⁶⁹ The information reported here on Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio are taken both from their project descriptions, available on the Emilia-Romagna Region's official website, under the "Transparent Administration" section, and from an online interview with two of its representatives that took place on the 21/02/2025.

Conclusions

The analysis of the implementation of Article 5 of regional law n. 2/2018 shows how the adoption of the RTO model has encouraged a culture of collaboration among actors in music education across Emilia-Romagna. This has helped contrasting the fragmentation of resources and the possible dispersion of investments, while simultaneously fostering the creation and expansion of an educational network potentially capable of reaching the entire regional territory.

Two main operational models have emerged. The first is characterised by broader regional coverage and locally grounded interventions that, although sharing common objectives, often appear less integrated. The second model is focused on more geographically concentrated areas, where local cohesion can be more easily achieved through shared planning and progressive harmonisation of activities. The coexistence of these two approaches already enriches the regional strategy: the former strengthens territorial reach, the latter enhances the systemic effectiveness of its interventions. Their progressive integration therefore represents a significant challenge for the future, as their convergence could contribute to create a more solid regional educational network and to guarantee long-term sustainability even beyond the triennial funding logic – which has already been partly overcome, as evidenced by the continued support of the same RTOs across multiple cycles.

Furthermore, the opportunity to receive financing for system-wide actions, so far mainly accessed by larger Associations, could also serve as a valuable resource for smaller organisations to increase the internal coherence of their work, through training and professional development for teachers and sector professionals.⁷⁰

In conclusion, the experience of regional law 2/2018 demonstrates the possibility of regional cultural policies to provide effective support to the music sector and to play a significant role in expanding access to music literacy. In this context, the promotion of a diversified and inclusive educational offer partly addresses the lack of music education within the Italian school system (Badolato & Scalfaro, 2013; Scalfaro, 2014). As the only Italian region to have enacted a dedicated law for the music sector, Emilia-Romagna reaffirms the strategic role of music within local cultural policy, acknowledging its value not only in cultural terms, but also as a driver of economic, social, and employment growth. In doing so, it represents a valuable and replicable model for other territories.

⁷⁰ The only Groupings that have ever included these actions within their activities are Senzaspine APS (since 2019) and Fondazione Rocca dei Bentivoglio (since 2024) and both have focused on inclusive education and teaching strategies. Associazione Assonanza ETS and Associazione Emiliano-Romagnola Cori (AERCO) APS have been primary recipients of this line of financing since the first cycle, promoting initiatives such as training programs for choir and community wind band conductors, as well as specialized courses addressing special educational needs. Moreover, in response to the most recent call, Assonanza also launched a training course for organisations and associations that operate in the Third Sector, aimed at developing administrative and accounting skills, knowledge on regulatory compliance, laws, and recent reforms.

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The Dragon meets the Bear: China-Russia Cultural Diplomacy through Actor-Network Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolving landscape of Chinese-Russian cultural diplomacy, focusing on the China-Russia Years of Culture (2024-2025) amidst Russia's pivot eastward and China's expanded global influence. Utilising Actor-Network Theory, I analyse how complex networks of human and non-human actants translate high-level political directives into tangible cultural initiatives and outcomes. I elaborate on the distinction between state and private participants of the cultural diplomacy landscape. Among many events, the paper focuses on the 2025 co-produced film *Red Silk* as a case study, dissecting its production, financing, and thematic content. Within a totalitarian regime like Russia diverse actants, both state and private, reinforce official policy agenda. Private agents also expand it to meet audience demand. The research further highlights a significant disparity in these initiatives' perceived importance between the two nations, demonstrating cultural diplomacy's key role in reinforcing strategic alliances, particularly for Russia, within a shifting geopolitical order.

Keywords:

Cultural diplomacy

Soft power

Actor-Network theory

China

Russia

Introduction

On 16 May 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin inaugurated 2024 and 2025 as the China-Russia Years of Culture and attended a concert in honour of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024). The initiative is not merely ceremonial; it represents a deliberate and concerted effort to fortify the partnership between Beijing and Moscow at a time when global power dynamics are in flux.

This is not the first time such cross-country cultural diplomacy initiatives take place. Previously, 2006 was the Year of Russia in China and vice versa for 2007 (Solomentseva, 2014). In 2024, however, in the context of increasing Western sanctions and isolation, Russia has significantly reoriented its foreign policy, with cultural diplomacy playing a crucial role in strengthening ties with China. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and particularly the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has faced unprecedented economic sanctions from the USA, Europe, and their allies. This pressure has propelled the country eastward, making China its most vital strategic partner. Cultural diplomacy, traditionally viewed as a soft power instrument, has emerged as a particularly attractive avenue for solidifying this reorientation, offering a means to build mutual understanding, foster goodwill, and reinforce shared narratives that transcend traditional political or economic agreements (Nye, 2005). Beijing, in turn, utilises these cultural initiatives to broaden its own global influence and demonstrate its commitment to a multi-polar world order, validating its partnership with Russia as part of a broader diplomatic strategy (Pang, 2021).

Soft power, defined as the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, relies on the appeal of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. In an era dominated by hard-power considerations, including military might and economic sanctions, the explicit emphasis on cultural initiatives by two major powers highlights how cultural influence can bolster strategic alliances (Scott-Smith, 2016). This research paper examines the tangible achievements of Chinese-Russian cultural diplomacy over the past year, analysing films, festivals, theatre performances, concerts and museum exhibitions. Utilising Actor-Network Theory (ANT), I analyse how networks of human and non-human actants translate high-level political directives into tangible cultural outcomes.

Akira Iriye emphasises the importance of transnational non-governmental agents in shaping international relations (Iriye, 1990). He argues that while states pursue foreign policy, the actual interactions and understandings between societies are often mediated and developed by a multitude of non-state actors, highlighting how cultural exchanges, even those initiated by governments, acquire their full meaning and impact through the involvement of diverse non-governmental entities. In recent years, cultural diplomacy scholarship has begun paying closer attention to a wide range of actors beyond official diplomatic channels (Grincheva, 2024). Government-driven cultural diplomacy now “operates in a more complex web of intersecting cultural relations being spun incessantly by myriad small and large players between nation-states and across the globe” (Ang et al., 2015, p. 372). To address this increased complexity in analysis, Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a powerful conceptual tool for dissecting the micro-processes of cultural diplomacy (Latour, 2007). ANT places an emphasis on the role of material objects, i.e., “non-human agents,” in social processes, treating all elements involved in a social phenomenon as “actants” that contribute to its formation and dynamics: “Actor-network theory, however, urges us to recognise that such “things” are an inherent part of the web of relations and field of practices that we study... Actor-network theory

expressly abandons the dichotomy between the semiotic and the material" (Nexon & Pouliot, 2013, pp. 343-344). In cultural diplomacy, this perspective allows to bring an additional level of nuance by examining not just of the decisions of presidents or Ministries of Culture, but also a) the agency of non-state organizations and individuals and b) the agency of non-material objects, e.g. a film script, the content or title of an exhibition, a specific piece of music, a digital platform, or even the logistical challenges of transporting artefacts. By tracing the networks formed by both human and non-human actors, one can understand how cultural projects are translated from high-level political directives into tangible events, how meanings are negotiated, adapted, or even subverted in the process of execution, and how the success or failure of cultural diplomacy is not solely determined by state intentions but by the complex interactions within these additional networks.

State and Private Actors in Chinese-Russian Cultural Relations

A shared cultural and artistic narrative, part of what Anderson called "imagined community," is a vital part of national self-identity at every level of a country's functioning, from ordinary citizens to top government officials (Anderson, 2000). The impetus for the surge in reciprocal cultural events in both China and Russia was the official government agreement at the highest executive level naming 2024 and 2025 as the China-Russia Years of Culture. Typically for a totalitarian state system, the current spread of Chinese cultural events in Russia in 2024 was directed from the top down: once the official order was issued, many arts organisations and regional cultural centres, many of which receive state funding, sought Chinese counterparties to execute projects consistent with the officially approved cultural policy (Kurennoy, 2021).

In 2024, it is estimated that 115 co-produced Sino-Russian cultural events and projects were executed. Among the most notable are those of high-profile national arts organisations that are based either in Moscow or St Petersburg. The Tretyakov Art Gallery exhibited 56 masterpieces of Russian art from the 16th century to today at the Capital Museum in Beijing, entitled *The Soul of Russia* (Hao, 2024). Both the Hermitage Museum and the State Museum of Oriental Art have held exhibitions of Chinese art explicitly under the auspices of the official Chinese-Russian Years of Culture initiative (Danichev, 2023; State Museum of Oriental Art, 2024). The State Historical Museum in Moscow has stated it will host an exhibition of the Terracotta Army in 2026 (Mamikonian, 2025). The Bolshoi and Mariinsky ballets went on extensive tours of Chinese cities, while Chinese theatre companies took part in performing arts festivals in St Petersburg (*Dance Open* ballet festival, theatre festival *Baltic House*, *Diaghilev P.S. International Festival of Arts*). The Theatre of Nations in Moscow, accustomed to inviting famous Western directors to stage performances before 2022, has now turned to Chinese theatre writers and directors for collaborations (Eroshenko, 2024). Notably, Russian regional arts organisations and cultural bodies have also been actively involved, including in Tatarstan, the host of

the BRICS summit in October 2024 (European Parliament, 2024). Local cultural bodies across Russia held official festivals in over 30 cities. In China, apart from Beijing, Russian cultural initiatives spread to other large cities. For instance, the *Russian Film Festival* was jointly launched in Beijing, Nanjing and Shenzhen in August 2024 (Global Times, 2024).

These cultural initiatives are meticulously curated to align with Russia's official cultural diplomacy objectives. They predominantly feature traditional Chinese cultural narratives, deemed ideologically permissible within Russia's highly regulated landscape. Examples encompass traditional Chinese cuisine, porcelain, and classical bird and flower paintings. Such presentations project an idealised, high-cultural view of China's historical legacy, deliberately omitting contemporary societal, artistic, or contentious issues. Furthermore, they reinforce a shared ideological emphasis on centuries-long traditions and a turn towards historical precedence, narratives actively propagated domestically within Russia. Consequently, Chinese cultural events serve a dual function in Russia's official cultural policy: first, they signal Russia's sustained international engagement and the presence of a powerful global ally despite stringent Western sanctions implemented since 2022; second, they validate Russia's domestically promoted traditional values by demonstrating alignment with those of a formidable friendly nation. This discussion has thus far focused on official cultural diplomacy as manifested by state and quasi-state actors. State actors include government ministries at national and regional levels, while quasi-state actors comprise significant state- or locally-funded cultural organisations (e.g., museums, theatres, choirs, ballet troupes) that are consequently obligated to comply with official cultural policy.

Even before the official designation of the China-Russia Years of Culture, China established a network of 18 Confucius Institutes across Russia, similar to its soft-power strategy in other countries around the world. Scholars have argued that Confucius Institutes often “can routinely deflect attention from more controversial and politically sensitive topics,” promoting more stereotypical Chinese associations of “pandas and chopsticks” (Albro, 2015: 391). This long-standing positioning of Confucius Institutes further aligns with the cultural narratives promoted under the current state cultural diplomacy programmes that focus on Chinese traditional arts, cuisine and literature.

In contrast to the narrow focus of official diplomacy, there has long been popular interest in Asian popular culture in Russia. Similar to Western states, it primarily focused on South Korean *hallyu*, which included K-pop music and films, and Japanese anime, manga and literature, including the huge popularity of books by Haruki Murakami. Much of the popular, non-state-induced interest in Chinese culture in Russia has been building before the official cultural policy took hold. Similar films and novels are popular in Russia as in the West; for example, the novel, *The Three-Body Problem* (三体), or the most financially profitable animation film to date, *Ne Zha 2* (哪吒二), released in the USA in April and in Russia in May 2025. In Russia in 2024, the top fiction writer by volume of books sold was the

Chinese fantasy author Mo Xiang Tong Xiu (墨香铜臭), who is a *New York Times* bestselling author.

This all shows that Russian grassroots audiences, similar to Western ones, demonstrate a sustained and varied interest in contemporary Chinese cultural outputs, in contrast to the historical and traditional focus of officially-induced cultural events and exhibitions held in Russia.

Red Silk: the Role of Human and Non-Human Actors

The discussion so far outlined the various state, quasi-state and private cultural organisations and events around the promotion of Chinese culture in Russia in 2024 and 2025. I showed that in a totalitarian state private actors are able to diverge from official policy, although they are constrained in their ability to do so as a large part of cultural funding is tied to state or quasi-state organisations. In this section, I presents a brief case study on the film *Red Silk* (*Красный шелк* in Russian, 红丝行动 in Chinese), a Russian-Chinese co-production slated for release in Russia in February 2025 and in China in September 2025. I examine the intricate network of human and non-human actants implicated in the film's production, financing, and creative processes, illustrating how their associations shape its place in the broader cultural diplomacy agenda.

Categorised as a nostalgic action-detective film, *Red Silk* is primarily scripted in Russian. Its narrative unfolds in 1927 within the still-young Soviet state, a period characterised by power struggles among vested interest groups. The Trans-Siberian Railway serves as a central non-human actant, mediating the plot which revolves around the precarious transportation of highly sensitive secret documents by Chinese Communist Party couriers across Russia. The train itself, functioning as a mobile closed network, consequently transforms into a nexus of intrigue, attracting and enrolling Western intelligence operatives and perilous criminals, all seeking to acquire these documents. Amidst this journey, a young Red Army soldier and translator, Artyom Svetlov, and a former Tsarist secret agent, Nikolai Garin, are compelled to collaborate in identifying a shared adversary. The film's focus on themes of historical friendship and shared struggles against a common Western enemy, along with its visual elements, are crafted to resonate with audiences in both countries. It promotes a positive image of the partner nation and reinforces narratives of enduring camaraderie. Such cinematic ties are particularly effective as visual media, capable of reaching broad audiences (Shaw, 2007).

Figure 1 illustrates the network of human and non-human actants actively involved in the film's financing, production, and distribution. While advertised as a Chinese-Russian co-production, the majority of resources, primarily from the Russian side, including all filming locations (Moscow, Saint Petersburg (Vitebsk Railway Station), Peterhof, Vyborg, Lake Baikal, Pskov Oblast), situate the film

within Russia's geographical and infrastructural network. The film's reported budget of approximately \$8.8 million is a comparatively substantial sum given lower production costs and wages in Russia relative to Hollywood. The film's financial network is largely constituted by three Russian government-affiliated corporations: Rostec State Corporation, a state-owned entity operating in defence, aerospace, automotive, and electronics industries; Russian Helicopters Holding, a government-owned civilian helicopter manufacturer; and the Cinema Foundation, an opaque funding body of the Russian Ministry of Culture (Rostec, 2024). These institutional actants actively translate state strategic interests into financial support, thereby shaping the film's trajectory, though most likely implicitly. From the Chinese side, China-based parts of the film were shot at the large and well-established Hengdian World Studios, giving the project credibility. A primary contribution from the Chinese side to this cinematic co-production involved the strategic designation of *Red Silk* as a local production in China. This designation, enables the film's widespread exhibition as a domestic feature across Chinese cinemas, circumventing the quota system for foreign films and extending its reach within the Chinese public sphere.

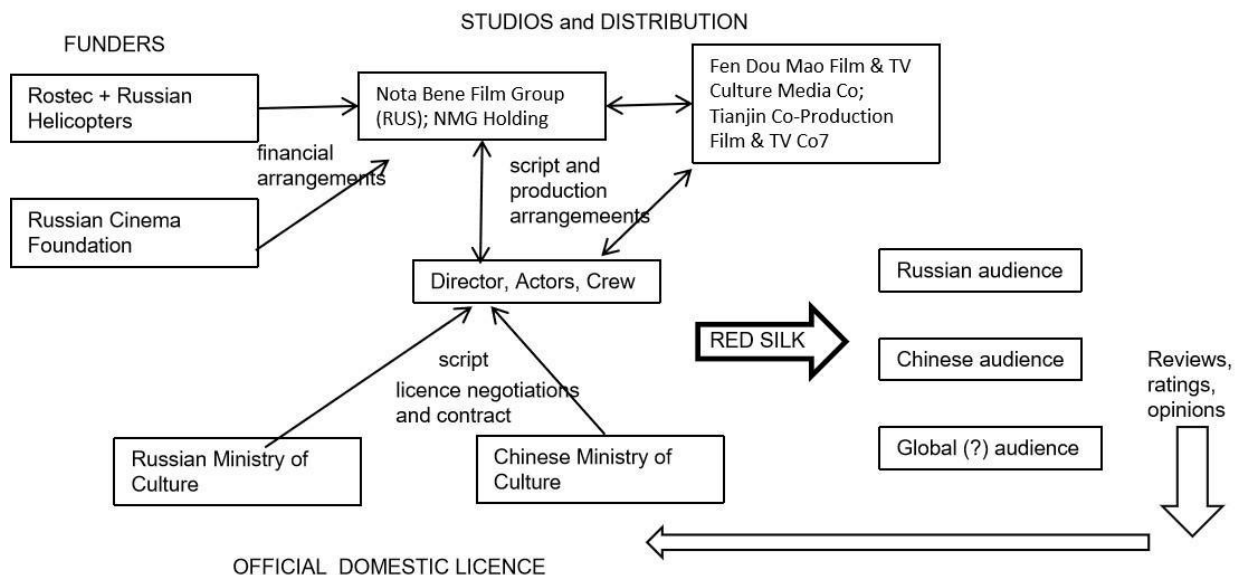


FIGURE 1. THE NETWORK OF HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS IN THE FILM *RED SILK*

Source: Author's research.

The film's plot emphasises the early cooperation between Soviet Russia and the Chinese Communist Party, thereby constructing a historical narrative. The film, functioning as a cultural artefact, is

explicitly presented as a collaboration that strengthens ties through the mediums of art, history, and shared storytelling. This alignment with the China-Russia Years of Culture initiative further positions the film as a key instrument in bilateral cultural diplomacy. Miloš Biković, the lead actor, of Serbian origin, but who has established a career in Russia, describes the film as a “ground-breaking spy thriller” and a “cinematic spectacle” that utilises a “global movie language.” This “global movie language” aims to facilitate broader understanding and resonate with diverse audiences, including those in Europe and America (The Fan Carpet, 2025). This articulation of the film’s universal appeal seeks to enrol wider international audiences, extending its diplomatic reach beyond immediate state-to-state relations. Whether this will be successful is doubtful, however, if the film manages to achieve wide viewership domestically in both Russia and China, this would already be a notable success.

Conclusion

While official state narratives emphasise the success of the China-Russia cultural partnership, non-state actors play a more dynamic and sometimes divergent role in actualising these initiatives. Governments often set the broad strategic direction for cultural diplomacy, providing frameworks for collaboration. However, the implementation of these directives often falls to a diverse array of non-state or quasi-state actors, including commercial film studios, theatre companies, artists, academic institutions, and non-governmental cultural organisations.

Private cultural agents in a totalitarian bureaucratic state like Russia most often adapt and localise diplomatic frameworks in ways that often reinforce the government’s agenda. Many non-state actors willingly align with the official narrative, as doing so often brings access to state funding, logistical support, or increased visibility. For instance, commercial film studios tend to embrace themes of historical friendship that align with state objectives, as in the case of *Red Silk*, ensuring its co-production receives favourable treatment. Music performers select folk-like, traditional repertoire that is culturally appealing to the partner nation while subtly reinforcing shared values promoted by the state. In these instances, non-state actors act as crucial conduits, translating abstract state goals into tangible cultural products that effectively disseminate the desired diplomatic message. They become “actants” within the state’s diplomatic network, extending its reach and legitimising its narrative through seemingly independent cultural production (Latour, 2007).

On the other hand, the dynamism of non-state actors also introduces elements that can subtly or overtly challenge state agendas. Artists and cultural producers are driven by audience demand to interpret officially promoted themes in ways that emphasise universal human experiences over explicit political messaging. In some cases, non-state actors might even intentionally push boundaries, testing the limits of what is acceptable within the state-sanctioned framework, though this

is less common in tightly controlled environments and has not been the case so far in Russia (Kurlantzick, 2008). This highlights that cultural diplomacy is not a monolithic, top-down process, but a negotiated space where diverse actants contribute to the final outcomes.

The significance of the cross-country China-Russia Years of Culture has been higher in Russia than in China. This disparity in perceived importance merits deeper investigation. In Russia, cultural initiatives with China are frequently highlighted across state media, framed as evidence of Russia's successful pivot away from Western influence and its secure position within a new, emerging geopolitical order. Each film premiere, exhibition opening, or cultural delegation visit receives considerable attention, often presented as a tangible demonstration of Russia's enduring international relevance despite Western isolation. For the Russian cultural sector, facing reduced opportunities for international collaboration due to sanctions and political tensions, the China-Russia Years of Culture represent a vital lifeline: providing new audiences, funding opportunities, and a sense of continued international engagement. Conversely, in China, while the China-Russia Years of Culture are acknowledged and supported, they appear to be one of many, albeit important, bilateral cultural initiatives. China maintains extensive cultural diplomacy programmes with countries across the globe, including nations in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and still, to a degree, with parts of the West. The volume and diversity of China's international cultural engagement mean that the specific focus on Russia, while significant, does not necessarily dominate the broader cultural diplomacy portfolio in the same way it does for Russia.

This difference in perceived significance is likely attributable to two primary factors: the smaller scale of Russian domestic cultural production (which amplifies the significance of any new initiative) and the greater restrictions on its foreign relations compared to China. Russia's cultural landscape, while rich, has faced challenges related to funding, infrastructure, and international access, particularly in recent years. Any substantial new international initiative, especially one backed by a major power like China, therefore carries greater weight and visibility within the Russian cultural ecosystem. China, by contrast, possesses a vast and increasingly robust domestic cultural industry, with significant state and private investment, and a far more diversified global cultural presence. Furthermore, Russia faces more severe and widespread restrictions on its foreign relations, particularly with Western countries, limiting its alternative avenues for cultural exchange. China, while also having tensions with the West, maintains extensive diplomatic and cultural ties globally, allowing for a broader range of partners and initiatives. Thus, for Russia, the China-Russia Years of Culture represent a more critical and conspicuous element of its current foreign policy and cultural strategy than for China, where it fits into a larger, more varied portfolio of international engagements.

Ultimately, this research provides insights into the evolving landscape of cultural diplomacy in the rapidly changing world where hard power (both military and economic) is a crucial factor of transnational relations. The case of the China-Russia Years of Culture underscores that even as

military and economic leverage continue to define geopolitical power, cultural attraction remains an indispensable tool for building enduring partnerships, shaping narratives, and legitimising alliances. For Russia, in particular, cultural diplomacy with China serves as a critical means to counter isolation and affirm its global standing. For both nations, it is a deliberate investment in a shared future, built not just on strategic imperatives but also on cultivated cultural affinity.

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Creation of Patriotism in Putin's Russia: The Case of Two Classical Music Capitals

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ABSTRACT

Patriotism as an ideology has strengthened in Russia, since Putin's 3rd term (2012-). Consequently, his era's cultural policy discourse has become more conservative, reinforcing patriotic events in state concert institutions. This article aims to describe how classical music programming in St. Petersburg and Moscow State Philharmonics, Mariinsky and Bolshoi Theaters are used to foster patriotism in citizens (2012-2025). The research uses a new theoretical field, sociopolitical musical semiotics, which reveals conscious concert programming's role in evoking patriotism in audiences. In the article, the major annual patriotic event Victory Day and the main classical music work linked to it, Dmitri Shostakovich's "Leningrad Symphony", are subjected to sociopolitical semiotic analysis and, thus address the main conundrum.

Keywords:

Russia
Patriotism
Cultural policy
Classical music
Musical semiotics

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm deeply grateful to Professor Vladimir Gelman and Docent Meri Herrala (University of Helsinki), who are supervising my PhD project.

Introduction

"We cannot have any other uniting idea than patriotism...It is our national idea" stated president Putin in 2016. In these historic days, when Russia is using ideology to justify its hostile actions, it is necessary to understand the means for its creation in regular citizens. In this article, I will explain how the regime uses classical music in harnessing patriotism in the two cultural capitals, Saint Petersburg and Moscow. This development has occurred since the start of Putin's 3rd presidential term (2012-). Subsequently, the nation began to drift away from Western liberalism and descend to conservatism. Since the "Basics of State Cultural Policy" was redefined in 2014, patriotism has emerged as an important aspect of cultural life. The report emphasises that culture has always been essential to "fostering feelings of patriotism and national pride", which ensures the unity of multinational Russian (Basics, 2014: 2). This notion, highlighted by Putin in multiple mediums, has functioned as a concrete meter for the rise of patriotism. Consequently, the regime gives patriotic events, e.g. Victory Day, high visibility in public life. Reinforcing feelings of love for the Motherland is harnessed through classical music institutions' programming. This article recognises the benefits of gaining insights on state classical music organisations' role in producing patriotic citizens to understand current events.

In Putin's era, musical semiotics (e.g. Tagg, 1999; Tarasti, 1994) is used to learn more about the patriot-ideological links between the events and the institution's concert programming. Conducting musical semiotic research is relevant, as it studies the effect of music in society and human life (Salgar, 2016: 3). This article is based on a previously overlooked method of sociopolitical semiotics, as it focuses on discovering the regime's political messages, portrayed through music (e.g. Tagg, 1999; Adorno, 1997). In studying relations of power and society with music, the concepts of myths (Barthes, 1957) and noo-politik (Nikonov, 2013; Lazzarato, 2006) form a dual basis for sociopolitical semiotics. In the Russian case, the regime uses classical music to spread patriotic ideology through propagating historical myths. Noo-politik, in turn, is used in Russian patriotic music programming to manipulate the society by elevating and promoting the regime's culture-political ideology. Combining the findings of these two notions, helps to gain insight on the mechanism of patriotism creation through classical music.

In compliance with the research's requirements, it is a qualitative, single case study (Creswell, 2013). The method was chosen, as the article aims to discover how classical music programming in Saint Petersburg and Moscow state institutions is used to foster patriotism in Russians during annual Victory Day events (2012-2025). Studying the patriotic meanings of concert programming in the chosen institutions, this article contributes to Russian studies and sociopolitical musical semiotics, presenting a Western viewpoint on the topic.

Patriotism in Russia

The article's 1st theoretical domain, patriotism, offers a foundation for comprehending how classical music in Putin's Russia instills patriotism in its people. Patriotism is a multifaceted phenomenon, based on the love for one's fatherland, which has received different connotations, depending on the interpreting country (e.g. Sakun & Ignatenko, 2022; Pavlov, 2018). Putin chose it as a national idea and the cornerstone of national unity. This includes respecting Russian history and 1000-year-old culture, traditional values, including orthodox spiritual values, which unite Russian peoples, along with pride and service to the fatherland (BBC News Русская служба, 2016). In this mindset divergent ideologies, as Westernism, are viewed to endanger this unity (e.g. McGlynn, 2023; Goode, 2016). By creating this atmosphere of united and patriotic Russia, under foreign threats, the regime validates its power status and political legitimacy.

The Putin listed themes have also been noted by domestic researchers. Analogously, Horina (2018: 95) states that Russian patriotism has historical roots in Peter the Great's era, when it became a form of governmental ideology and the holy trinity of "God, Czar, Fatherland". Since then, the nation's sociopolitical landscape has included various degrees of patriotic ideology. Since 2022, a statist form

of patriotism has emerged in Russia (Fomin, 2024). There Putin's ideological cornerstones, as “traditional values”, “trust in state institutions” and “service to the fatherland” (ibid. :14) form the basis, while possessing the core tenets of the imperial times, albeit with modified emphasis. Statist patriotism is further articulated in the state cultural policy reports (2014-2025), where its actualisation is specified in connection to culture. Regarding the article topic, Basics (2014: 10) highlights cultural organisations, as philharmonics and theater's, role in “historical and cultural enlightenment and education” of the citizens. This refers to organising concert spectacles, which promote Russian historical memory, depicting the ancestors' heroic deeds. Especially annual Victory Day celebrations, organised in relation to the Great Patriotic War's valor, are at the core of memory politics (e.g. Fomin, 2024; Baekken, 2023; Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021).

Sociopolitical Musical Semiotics

The article's 2nd theoretical domain is sociopolitical musical semiotics. In the 1950s, musicologists became interested in musical semiotics, the study of musical meaning (Seeger, 1960; Cooke, 1959; Meyer, 1956). Nonetheless, those studies recognized the drawbacks of concentrating solely on studying textual music, which forms the basis for Saussurian semiology (Salgar, 2016: 8). Peirce (1960) overcame this obstacle by placing music inside social contexts and interpreting meanings between three components: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. This discovery is important for the study, because the triadic formation can be used to explain the musical event during a Russian patriotic concert: I) patriotic ideology (representamen), II) classical music, which holds the meaning (object), and III) citizens' interpretation of the combination of the 1st two (interpretant). Regarding the musical semiotic events situational nature, Lotman's semiosphere model (1984) becomes relevant. Semiosphere can be understood as a metaphorical space, which projects cultural values onto a certain culturally bound geographical space. These spaces, as Russia, form social constructions, where ideologies can be spread to people through semiotic processes. The regime's patriotic imaginaries, portrayed by music, can be defined through sociopolitical semiotics.

Sociopolitical musical semiotics (e.g., Salgar, 2016; Tagg, 2012, 1999; Frith, 1996) aims to demonstrate how society and power circulate through music. To define the musical meanings specifics inside Russian society, myths (Barthes, 1957) and *noo-politik* (Nikonov, 2015; Lazzarato, 2006; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999) are explored. According to Barthes (1957) myths are based on human history, possess a contextual nature, and can be modified by humans. Furthermore, myths participate in ideology creation and are useful in giving semiotic signs new meanings (ibid). To provide people common and patriotic history to believe in, Russian historical memory and wartime myths, e.g.

ancestors' heroic actions during the Great Patriotic War (e.g. Fomin, 2024; Alkatiri & De Archellie 2021; Goode, 2016), are constantly purified and recreated.

Noo-politik, in succession, is a political soft power strategy, which bases on dominant "ideas, interests, norms, laws and morals" (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999: 46). Lazzarato (2006) continues that it includes e.g. memory modulation through creating worlds of meaning. In creating Russian patriotism through ideological and historical classical music programming, the regime influences the citizens' perceptions through powerful imaginaries.

Next, I present the article's main findings linked to a major annual patriotic event, Victory Day, which celebrated its 80th anniversary this year. It is founded on a qualitative single case study, which was subjected to sociopolitical semiotic analysis. The primary sources incorporate documented data of concert programmes of St. Petersburg and Moscow State Philharmonics, Mariinsky and Bolshoi Theaters (2012-2025), and literature related to the chosen patriotic event (e.g. McGlasson, 2024; Gray, 2000).

The following section is divided into two parts. The 1st part focuses on Victory Day's semiotic aspects, and is divided into myths and noo-politik. The 2nd part presents Leningrad Symphony by Dmitri Shostakovich, the main composition linked to the festivities, following the semiotic division, mentioned in the 1st part.

Case Event: Victory Day

Victory Day (День Победы) is the most important patriotic holiday, celebrated on 9th of May, in Russia and many former Soviet countries. The celebration commemorates the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) against Nazi Germany (e.g. Pakhamova, 2024; McGlynn, 2023), and has become an integral part of the Russian patriotic propaganda machine, reinforcing the regime's political and ideological objectives.

Following the conclusion of the war on May 9th, 1945, Victory Day was 1st celebrated as a national holiday and then as an official holiday in 1965 (Lane, 1981: 145). Since the Soviet era, celebration of Victory Day has maintained an almost identical structure, which according to Alkatiri and De Archellie (2021: 7) and Rouhier-Willoughby (2003: 25) consist of a military parade, commemoration of the people involved in the war effort and a festive meal at home. Nowadays, the festivities have further expanded and Pakhamova (2024:15) recites that they present diverse programs, e.g. public commemorative events, concerts and military parades. Victory Day is clearly ritualized with the intention of uniting Russia's multinational population through a shared sense of celebration (Rouhier-Willoughby, 2003: 29). These rituals, based on national historical background, have created a fruitful ground for the regime to mythify the great victory story to uplift the nation's self-perception.

Myth(s) behind Victory Day

Victory in the Great Patriotic War has become a foundational myth in Putin's Russia (e.g. Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021: 9; Beshkinskaya & Miller, 2020: 201), bringing forward ritualistic practices that evoke patriotic pride and nostalgia in the masses. The central theme of the myth(s) emphasizes the Soviet people's hardship, bravery, and triumph over the enemy.

The ritualized war myth has certain, fixed procedures, which pay tribute to the celebration and symbolise the unity between the people and the regime. Of these, Victory Day parade and "Immortal Regiment" march are the most prominent, attracting masses of participants. The president moderates the military Victory Day parade in Red Square, aiming to preserve Soviet traditions and common historical memories of Russians regarding their contributions to the victory (Pakhamova, 2024: 15; Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021: 4). Additionally, the parade offers Putin historical justification for raising Russians' patriotic feelings (Hue'rou, 2015: 30–32; Omelchenko et al., 2015: 27–29). Conversely, "Immortal Regiment" march is a newer custom that began in 2012, becoming state-controlled in 2015 (Davydova-Minguet, 2022: 230). These marches are arranged by descendants of Soviet soldiers, carrying photos of their relatives to preserve their memory (McGlynn, 2025; Nemtsev, 2019), thus participating subconsciously in the regime's memory politics.

Putin uses Victory Day parade and "Immortal Regiment" march as calculated myth-based strategies to enforce intergenerational patriotic duty and common historical memory. According to Seniavskii and Seniavskii (2017: 340–341) historical memory is the basis of national self awareness, which has a significant impact on a state's and its citizens' viability. Putin has noted this, since he has executed national initiatives to promote patriotism and national unity by utilizing shared historical recollections, e.g. fallen troops- and civilian wartime memories connected to the Victory (Davydova-Minguet, 2022: 229; Lazzari, 2015: 106). The idea is founded on the state's wish to transmit it to future generations so that they too absorb the patriotic mindset. Putin has, thus, launched patriotic education programs for the younger generation to instill patriotism and respect for the fatherland's defenders' memory (Beshkinskaya & Miller, 2020: 203). These programs, with the families' wartime stories, ensure that patriotic spirit and common values are transferred to the descendants.

The war myth(s) possess a dual narrative structure. The main narrative presents Russia as a "great power" (Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021: 9; Lazzari, 2015: 108), which aided Europe during WWII (Beshkinskaya & Miller, 2020: 219). Concentrating on Russia's role in maintaining peace and the "natural order of things," this interpretation portrays Russia as a bringer of balance (Lazzari, 2015: 108).

The secondary narrative emphasises the continuous fight with foreign enemies (e.g. Davydova-Minguet, 2022: 231; Lazzari, 2015: 108). According to it, Russia is under continuous attacks of hostile

ideologies, as fascism (Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021: 5), and attempts of falseful historical revisionism (Davydova-Minguet, 2022: 231). These attacks are however defeated and everything returns to normal.

Finally, war myth(s) possess a temporal nature, which is open to manipulated interpretations (e.g. Arribas et al., 2023: 3; Lazzari, 2015: i). In Russia this refers to state-led historical event revisions, which aim to reduce the impact of opposing Western narratives within the Russian public sphere (Kratochvíl & Shakhanova, 2020: 1), allowing the Kremlin to justify its political- and power positions to citizens.

Noo-politik behind Victory Day

Noo-politik also influences how Victory Day is interpreted. It is viewed as cognitive warfare in the Russian context, as the Kremlin uses various media platforms to influence local and foreign beliefs (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2020: 42–43). Russian media, as state television, radio and social media platforms (e.g. Davydova-Minguet, 2022; Makhortykh, Lyebiedyev & Kravtsov, 2021), base their functions on Russian collective memory, with strong imaginaries about the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (e.g. Arribas et al. 2023: 18-19; Alkatiri & De Alchellie, 2021: 9). There the meaning of Victory Day to Russian citizens is exploited by creating emotional links between them and “authentic heroic past” (Davydova-Minguet, 2022: 238). This connection has been acknowledged and strategised in Putin’s presidential speeches. Since 2004, they have focused on patriotism, with an emphasis on the Victory narrative (Alkatiri & De Archellie, 2021: 12; Lazzari, 2015: 105). He now uses it as a guiding concept to oppose Western ideologies. To stop this, Russia must rediscover its patriotism and unite around a strong state and its historic values. The foundation of this consolidation is common history, culture, and customs, which must be promoted and protected from Russia’s enemies (Kratochvíl & Shakhanova, 2020; Malinova, 2021).

Harnessing “historical narratives” or Kremlin-created disinformation and historical propaganda, also validates Russian foreign policy agenda. According to Cullen et al. (2021: 9) the disinformation campaign is also used as means of foreign interference, placing it among hybrid threats. The state’s propaganda targets especially diaspora Russians, causing them to resent their host institutions in favor of Russian ones, thus interfering with foreign democratic proceedings (Arribas et al. 2023: 4). Here the Kremlin’s end game is to create a water divider between Russian people and the West, e.g. by painting the Baltic countries and Poland as Nazi sympathisers (ibid.). Through stories embedded in the Victory myth, Russians are indoctrinated to keep fighting against divergent ideologies, which unites the country and maintains the dominant status quo.

Leningrad Symphony

I discovered that Dmitri Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony is the primary classical music work associated with Victory Day festivities.

Shostakovich was living in Leningrad in 1941 when the Great Patriotic War against Nazi-Germany began (e.g. Pellegrino, d'Erizans & Adragna, 2017: 4; Gray, 2000). In response to the atrocities of wartime, he began writing his new symphony. According to Behrman (2021) and Pellegrino, d'Erizans and Adragna (2017), the work was dedicated to his hometown and, thus, dubbed "Leningrad". The composition process started on July 19th, 1941, and was completed on December 27th, when the composer was evacuated to Kuibyshev (now called Samara) by the Stalinist authorities (Blickenstaff, 2007: 2-4).

The Symphony's Leningrad premiere occurred August 9th, 1942, on the 335th day of the 872-day Leningrad blockade (Pellegrino, d'Erizans & Adragna, 2017: 4) by Leningrad Radio Orchestra's remaining members and hired musicians, under Karl Eliasberg's baton (e.g. McGlasson, 2024: 18; Gray, 2000). According to Putin (2022) the performance was scheduled as a grand defensive gesture against the Nazis, who had designated the day to celebrate the fall of Leningrad. Operation Squall, the Red Army's assault, ensured that Nazi soldiers encircling the city with continuous artillery fire would remain silent, so the live broadcast could reach the people in Leningrad (Al Lawati, 2023: 40; Behrman, 2021). Following that, the concert was broadcast across the city and towards the enemy lines (e.g. McGlasson, 2024: 18 Blickenstaff, 2007: 6), which raised the people's spirits and discouraged the Nazi attackers.

Myth(s) behind Leningrad Symphony

Leningrad Symphony is surrounded by historical myths, connecting it to the regime's propaganda purposes.

Gray (2000) claims that Shostakovich's portrayal as a devoted socialist contributed in creating these myths.

This occurred, because Stalin's regime utilised Shostakovich's composing skills to advance their political objectives. It included protracting evidence of Soviet humanity, which validated the Union's accomplishments against the Nazis and reinforced Allied-Soviet wartime alliance (e.g. McGlasson, 2024: 21; MacCurtain, 2013: 366).

Shostakovich acknowledged that he must adhere to socialist realism's rules to preserve his creative independence. This strategy made Shostakovich the forefront Soviet composer- and the Symphony an anti-fascist hymn (Al Lawati, 2023: 28-29, 41). Yet, the Symphony's message holds dual meaning: the regime's official- and the composer's hidden meaning. Gray (2000) states, the official perspective portrays patriotism, which encourages fighting the enemy. However, Shostakovich truly wanted it to symbolise opposition to totalitarianism (Al Lawati, 2023: 28; Fay, 2000: 128).

Leningrad Symphony is by instrumentation and length a showcase of Shostakovich composition capabilities. The programmatic Symphony's four movements present themes, altering from agony and distress, but also infusing the people's heroic defiance and hope during Leningrad blockade (Pellegrino, d'Erizans & Adragna, 2017: 4).

The 1st movement, "War" (*Allegretto*), illustrates peaceful life in Leningrad before the beginning of the Great Patriotic War (e.g. Farrell, 2019; Gray, 2000; Blickenstaff, 2000: 7). This is stopped by Nazi invasion, depicted by the "invasion theme" or Stalin's march. This theme originally symbolised Stalin's reign of terror before shifting to Hitler following the invasion, highlighting the work's dual connotations (McGlasson, 2024: 19–20). Fay (2000: 129) states that invasion is followed by a devastating funeral march and remembrance of the war's casualties. Finally, distant thunder recurs, indicating that the war is still continuing (*ibid*).

The 2nd movement, "Reminiscences" (*Moderato, poco allegretto*), pictures memories of pre-war days in the USSR (e.g. McGlasson, 2024: 20; Al Lawati, 2023: 41-42). According to Behrman (2021), the movement combines two extremes, ranging from melancholy and daydreaming to frantic wrath. This emphasizes how "peaceful" the Soviet era appeared to be, yet it was a time of terror.

The 3rd movement, "Russia's Vastness" (*Adagio - attacca*), portrays Leningrad's beauty at twilight, which reaffirms the people's heroic spirit (e.g. Al Lawati, 2023: 41-42; Blickenstaff, 2007: 8). The movement comprises three sections, where the slow opening depicts nostalgia for the bygone Leningrad, the middle contrasts and is violent, depicting the air raids, and the conclusion honors victims of the war and Stalin's purges (McGlasson, 2024: 20, Behrman, 2021). Shostakovich's ability to use his music to portray implicative degrees of Soviet realism is demonstrated here once more.

The 4th movement, "Victory" (*Allegro non troppo*), assures the people of the inevitable victory in the Great Patriotic War (Al Lawati, 2023: 41-42; Blickenstaff, 2007: 8). It features various political, cultural, and military themes (Farrell, 2019), culminating in a major battle that the Soviet army eventually wins. The triumph of humanity over barbarism is Shostakovich's definition of victory in this context (Blickenstaff, 2007: 8).

Soviet political-historical and humanistic myths are combined in Leningrad Symphony. It affirms Stalin's regime's achievements on the global stage, and the people's heroism and humanity. These

attributes, ingrained in common history strengthened the Russian people's morale both then and today.

Noo-politik behind Leningrad Symphony

The Putinist regime is currently employing the Leningrad Symphony as a noo-political tool. It is strategically chosen, since it possesses a direct connection to a common historic event, which is familiar and holds meaning to Russians. Therefore the patriot-historical Symphony has been selected to depict the Kremlin's hidden messages.

Noo-politik can also be seen as reflexive control (e.g. Vasara, 2020; Thomas, 2015). According to Veprintsev et al. (2011), it can be applied to social control and manipulation. Employing specific media outlets, reflexive control is harnessed in Russia to influence public opinion to fulfill the regime's goals by making historical comparisons with the present (Vasara, 2020: 78-79; Thomas, 2015: 117). It, thus, manipulates Russian citizens' to make seemingly independent decisions from the regime's ideology by turning noo-political activities towards them.

The Kremlin's messages, as they pertain to Leningrad Symphony, are recycled from several eras, giving them temporal nature. The Symphony was recognized as a cultural weapon throughout the Soviet era and represented the people's resistance against the Nazis (Behrman, 2021). Consequently, the symbolic meaning of fighting the common enemy has persisted throughout history, initially against Westerns during the Cold War and subsequently against the "Nazi" West during Putin's era.

The Symphony's patriotic themes are currently Putin's media statements main focus. According to Putin (2022), it has four recurrent themes: i) Russian people's bravery and tenacity; ii) the prophetic assertion of victory and triumph of humanity against nazism; iii) love for the Motherland and willingness to defend it; and iv) the unifying true and eternal values. His regime has deliberately chosen these themes to communicate to the people that Russia is a great country with a rich common past that must be transmitted to future generations.

Conclusion

This article examined how Putin's regime employs classical music programming to promote patriotism in Russian people during Victory Day celebrations through Moscow and Saint Petersburg state institutions (2012–2025). Based on the institution's programming, Dmitri Shostakovich's "Leningrad Symphony" was the main composition played throughout the celebrations. For understanding this

phenomenon, the article used sociopolitical musical semiotics (Salgar, 2016), divided by myths (Barthes, 1957) and noo-politik (e.g. Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999).

The 1st section provided the historical context of Victory Day and general semiotic aspects linked to it, presented through myth(s) and noo-politik. Here the celebration's evolution into a Russian patriotic propaganda tool, which supports the regime's political and ideological agenda, is emphasized. Victory Day possesses ritualistic elements, based on common historical background, as commemorative events and parades, which aim to unify the multinational people.

Victory Day myths highlight the Soviet people's bravery and adversity during wartime, in addition to victory over the enemy. Through collective historical memory, the regime uses these myth(s) to impose patriotism and intergenerational patriotic duty in the people.

Noo-politik or state-led influencing on public's political thinking through media, is predicted on the collective memory and imaginaries of the victory. As part of the regime's foreign policy approach, these manipulated historical narratives are used to entice the population to reject opposing ideologies. Thus, they help preserve the status quo and present a united Russian front worldwide.

The latter section concentrated on Leningrad Symphony, including also the composition's historical context and the semiotic divide of myth(s) and noo-politik. The historical part notes how important the Symphony was in encouraging people to fight and discouraging the Nazi attackers during the Leningrad blockade.

Leningrad Symphony myth(s) are utilised in the regime's propaganda. By demonstrating Soviet humanity during WWII, they strengthened the Allied-Soviet alliance. Knowing that his compositional abilities were exploited to further Stalin's political goals, Shostakovich blended hidden messages with the dictatorship's. The Symphony, thus, holds dual meaning: the official, patriotic meaning, and the composer's anti-authoritarian one. The work's movements depict themes related to the War, beginning with peacetime and the onset of it, moving from nostalgia to horrors of the present, and concluding with assertion of the inevitable Soviet victory. These themes, embedded in shared history, uplifted the Russians spirits both then and now.

Noo-politik is viewed as reflexive control (e.g. Vasara, 2020), meaning that specific media platforms, e.g. classical music, serve in manipulating public opinion to achieve the regime's objectives by comparing past and present. Putin has employed Leningrad Symphony as a noo-political tool, given its connection to a shared historical event that is meaningful and familiar to Russians. His interpretation of the work (Putin, 2022) underlines the music's patriotic themes, which are crucial for unifying the nation and must be transmitted to future generations.

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Shifting paradigms in cultural diplomacy: new approaches for effective international dialogue in an era of multiple crises

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the transformations of cultural diplomacy from traditional state-centred approaches to complex, multi-actor ecosystems, analysing the typologies of contemporary practices, the paradigmatic shifts through deinstitutionalisation and deterritorialisation processes, and the dynamic responses it encompasses. The research explores emerging practices including citizen diplomacy, heritage diplomacy, and cross-national blockchain preservation and crowdfunding, whilst examining how cultural content has become a battlefield for influence through hashtag hijacking and narrative wars. The study investigates crisis response mechanisms and conflict resolution applications, analysing culture's role as a sustained enhancer of security. Through transectorial conceptual approaches like Indigenous philosophies and intergenerational responsibility frameworks integrated within official and strategic national and transnational documents, the research demonstrates how contemporary cultural diplomacy transcends traditional boundaries to address

Keywords:

Cultural diplomacy,
Deterritorialisation,
Streaming
diplomacy,
Narrative wars,
Enhancer of
security

systemic crises. The findings reveal cultural diplomacy's evolution from soft power instrument to essential mechanism for building global resilience, where cultural heritage serves as both object and means of integrated international action.

Typologies of cultural diplomacy practices

Over the past decade, there has been much discussion about changing both the perception and actual practice of cultural diplomacy⁷¹ - from an instrument used at state level, with a governmental agenda directed towards specific national interests, towards a broad, holistic, horizontal approach, managed primarily by non-state actors, which goes beyond "national interest"⁷².

This broad approach to cultural diplomacy highlights a fundamental reality: the challenges it addresses - from disinformation to climate change, from inequalities to conflicts - transcend national boundaries and the capacity of any single actor to resolve them. Thus cultural diplomacy has in many cases surpassed the definition of an orchestrated plan of cultural activities for a foreign audience, including due to the current context of global power and "glocal" influence⁷³ of social networks and other communication tools that use big data⁷⁴. The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD) assures us that "[cultural diplomacy] can be conducted by government bodies, private entities or civil society organisations, each contributing to the broader objective of building trust and dialogue beyond cultural divisions"⁷⁵. Academic literature attempts to clarify matters by beginning with the definition of concepts and the migration of their meanings: cultural diplomacy, culture as a global public good,

⁷¹ The term *diplomacy* derives through French from ancient Greek *diplōma*, composed of *diplo*, meaning "folded in two", and the suffix *-ma*, meaning "an object". The folded document conferred a privilege - often a travel permit - to the bearer, and the term came to designate documents through which princes granted such favours. Encyclopædia Britannica, "Diplomacy; Definition, Meaning, Types & Examples", <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomacy>.

⁷² Ang, Ien, Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Phillip Mar, 2015. "Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?" *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 365-381.

⁷³ Glocal refers to phenomena, processes or strategies that are simultaneously global in vision/scope and local in application/adaptation.

⁷⁴ Communication tools based on big data include social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) that personalise content through algorithms, digital marketing tools (Google Ads, Mailchimp, HubSpot) for targeting and automation, streaming services (Netflix, Spotify, YouTube) with personalised recommendations, analytics platforms (Google Analytics, Hootsuite) for monitoring online behaviour, and AI technologies (chatbots, voice assistants) that process massive volumes of data to optimise user experience and anticipate their preferences.

⁷⁵ Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD), „What is Cultural Diplomacy?", https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy=

international cultural relations, "soft power" (the subtle power of culture) and "smart power", "the conceptual convergence between public diplomacy, propaganda and public relations"⁷⁶.

To understand how this transformation is reflected in institutional frameworks, UNESCO believes in "the free exchange of ideas and knowledge... to understand each other better and to know more profoundly and authentically the way we live" (quoted from the UNESCO Constitution⁷⁷) and positions itself as a global platform that facilitates cultural diplomacy through its normative instruments and programmes⁷⁸. For UNESCO, cultural diplomacy is a multi-objective approach - from stimulating economic development to consolidating peace and security. This diplomacy is organised across several domains of practice, such as diplomacy through the arts, educational diplomacy, linguistic diplomacy, media diplomacy, ideological diplomacy or religious diplomacy. Within each domain, specific instruments are used⁷⁹ such as exhibitions and festivals (in the arts), exchanges and educational programmes (in education), language teaching and literature (in the linguistic domain), broadcasting (in media), as well as intercultural dialogue and social campaigns.

To understand these evolving practices, it is essential to examine the theoretical underpinnings that have shaped contemporary cultural diplomacy.

In his 2013 work "Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future," historian Akira Iriye analyses the "historiographical revolution" from the post-1990 period, highlighting how the global approach became influential "together with the emphasis on transnational actors (for example, non-state organisations) and on themes (for example, migrations, human rights)," demonstrating that international history "traditionally conceived as a study of interrelations between states, has been increasingly placed in the context of transnational history"⁸⁰. This theoretical perspective is complemented by practical definitions from cultural diplomacy, with the political scientist Milton Cummings conceptualising cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other

⁷⁶ Hukil, Sonia. "Is Public Diplomacy Inherently a Manifestation of 'Soft Power'?" *Glendown Journal of International Studies* 8, no. 1-2 (2015), 1.

⁷⁷ "Free exchange of ideas and knowledge... for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives," UNESCO, "Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation," <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>.

⁷⁸ UNESCO. "Cutting Edge. From standing out to reaching out: cultural diplomacy for sustainable development," 27 January 2022, updated 20 April 2023. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-standing-out-reaching-out-cultural-diplomacy-sustainable-development>.

⁷⁹ UNESCO, "Cutting Edge."

⁸⁰ Akira Iriye, "Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future" (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

aspects of culture between nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding"⁸¹. The historian argues that the traditional understanding of international relations as simple competition for power and wealth must be reconsidered, contending that a durable and stable world order cannot be based solely on governments and power politics; it also depends on the open exchange of cultures between peoples in pursuit of common intellectual and cultural interests⁸².

For political science professor Patricia Goff, cultural diplomacy functions as an "entry point"⁸³ through its capacity to build bridges of understanding where traditional diplomacy may fail. Goff argues in her study "Cultural Diplomacy" that this form of diplomacy enables access to communities and audiences that would not otherwise be reached by official channels, offering an alternative narrative about a nation that can counterbalance negative or incomplete perceptions. Through the use of art, education and cultural exchanges, cultural diplomacy succeeds in humanising international relations and providing context for political decisions, demonstrating that there are common elements between peoples despite official differences. Goff highlights that this approach does not merely transmit a unidirectional message, but facilitates reciprocal understanding based on equality, enabling the creation of lasting relationships that can survive changes of government and temporary political tensions.

Cultural diversity⁸⁴ in the contemporary diplomatic context manifests through "multiple ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression,"⁸⁵ and this accumulation becomes a determining factor in shaping modern international relations. The 2005 UNESCO Convention emphasises that "cultural diversity constitutes a common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all"⁸⁶, thus positioning diversity as a central element of contemporary multilateral diplomacy. "The special relevance of the cultural diversity problem stems from its position at the intersection between the domestic dimension (referring to multiculturalism, identity, nationalism,

⁸¹ Milton C. Cummings Jr., "Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey" (Washington DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003), 1.

⁸² Akira Iriye: Cultural Internationalism and World Order, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997 (The Albert Shaw Memorial Lectures)," *Human Rights in Development Online* 5, no. 1 (1998): 257-263, <https://doi.org/10.1163/221160898X00111>.

⁸³ Patricia M. Goff, "Cultural Diplomacy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, ed. Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford Academic, 2013), 419-435, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0024>.

⁸⁴ "(...) dialogue can triumph over discord, (...) diversity is a universal virtue and (...) the peoples of the world are much more united by their common destiny than they are divided by their separate identities," Kofi Annan, "Address to the Meeting on the Dialogue among Civilizations" (United Nations, New York, September 5, 2000), UN Press Release SG/SM/7526, <https://press.un.org/en/2000/20000905.sgs7526.doc.html>.

⁸⁵ UNESCO, "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000142919>.

⁸⁶ UNESCO, "Convention on the Protection and Promotion."

democracy, security, religion, heritage), the international dimension (cultural diversity between states, culture as an instrument of foreign policy, international security, migration, international trade in cultural goods and services) and the transnational dimension (mixed identities, diasporas, the transnational power of religion)"⁸⁷. At the European Union level, different strategic documents have been created in cascade. As always, it started from the definition of culture, which in this case received the following definition - contextual: "culture does not refer only to arts or literature. It extends across a wide range of policies and activities, from intercultural dialogue to tourism, from education and research to creative industries, from heritage protection to promoting creative industries and new technologies, and from crafts to development cooperation."⁸⁸.

These evolving conceptual frameworks have given rise to diverse operational models that reflect different approaches to cultural diplomacy practice. Dean's Professor of Political Science, International Affairs, and Diplomacy and Director of the Center for International Affairs and World Cultures Mai'a K. Davis Cross, in the book "European Public Diplomacy: Soft Power at Work," argues that European public diplomacy is based on communicating narratives that incorporate key norms about society, with the ultimate goal of obtaining soft power for the country engaging in this activity⁸⁹. The volume *The European Union as a Global Cultural Power*, edited by Mafalda Damaso and published in the "Transnational Approaches to Culture" series by De Gruyter, addresses the emergence of the European Union as an enabling power that facilitates global cultural development, one that does not exercise cultural neocolonialism, but supports global cultural diversity through programmes, policies and modes of governance that enable actors from third countries to develop their own cultural capacities. This transnational and transdisciplinary approach transcends traditional paradigms of soft power or normative power, instead promoting cooperation and intercultural understanding based on mutual trust and reciprocal recognition⁹⁰.

This theoretical foundation finds practical expression through various institutional frameworks and operational models that have emerged globally. The conceptual evolution reflects the transformation

⁸⁷ Irena Kozymka, *The Diplomacy of Culture: The Role of UNESCO in Sustaining Cultural Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

⁸⁸ European Commission, "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations," JOIN(2016) 29 final (Brussels, June 8, 2016), section 2(d), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN:2016:29:FIN#footnote3>.

⁸⁹ Mai'a K. Davis Cross, "Conceptualizing European Public Diplomacy," in *European Public Diplomacy: Soft Power at Work*, ed. Mai'a K. Davis Cross and Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5.

⁹⁰ Mafalda Damaso, "Introduction," in *The European Union as a Global Cultural Power*, ed. Mafalda Damaso (De Gruyter Brill, 2025), 1-27.

of cultural diplomacy from traditional governmental approaches to more complex forms that include non-state actors and transnational organisations⁹¹.

At the operational level, the contemporary landscape of cultural diplomacy is still populated by national cultural institutes that operate as key instruments of international cultural relations, with institutions such as the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) coordinating 18 representations across 17 countries under its comprehensive 2022-2026 strategy⁹², the French Institute serving as the central operator for France's external cultural policy, British Council reaching 600 million people globally through its presence in over 100 countries, Goethe-Institut maintaining 151 institutes across 98 countries, Instituto Cervantes promoting Spanish language and culture worldwide, Instituto Camões advancing Portuguese cultural values across five continents, Confucius Institutes representing Chinese cultural diplomacy with 530 centres globally⁹³, and the Japan Foundation facilitating comprehensive international cultural exchange programmes. Some of these institutions function within complex international networks, most notably the EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) network, which operates through 143 clusters in over 100 countries under its Strategic Framework 2025-2029⁹⁴ and serves as the EU's primary interlocutor for international cultural relations. The European Union's approach to international cultural relations was outlined in the 2016 Joint Communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations'⁹⁵. Distinctive of the European model is the focus on people-to-people contacts and co-creation processes, in contrast with traditional "showcase" practices, prioritising cultural cooperation with partner countries in three main directions: supporting the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, facilitating access to culture and cultural education, and strengthening the role of culture as a vector for social cohesion and sustainable peace⁹⁶. There is also the current Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026⁹⁷ incorporates

⁹¹ Natalia Grincheva, "The past and future of cultural diplomacy," *Cultural Trends* 32, no. 3 (2023): 179-195, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10286632.2023.2183949>.

⁹² Romanian Cultural Institute Strategy (2022-2026), available at <https://www.icr.ro/pagini/strategia-institutului-cultural-roman-2022-2026>, in Romanian, English, French, and German.

⁹³ Shao-Cheng Sun, "The Confucius Institutes: China's Cultural Soft Power Strategy," *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 6, no. 1 (2023): 52-68, <https://cultureandvalues.org/index.php/JCV/article/download/212/102/>.

⁹⁴ EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture, EUNIC Global, "EUNIC Strategic Framework 2025-2029" (2025), <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/about>.

⁹⁵ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations," Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN(2016) 29 final (Brussels, June 8, 2016), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN:2016:29:FIN>.

⁹⁶ Riccardo Trobbiani, "EU Cultural Diplomacy: Time to define Strategies, Means and Complementarity with Member States," EL-CSID Policy Brief 2017/3 (Brussels: Institute for European Studies, 2017).

⁹⁷ Council of the European Union, "Council resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026," adopted November 29, 2022, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/council-of-ministers-agrees-on-new-eu-work-plan-for-culture-2023-2026>.

international cultural relations as one of its four priorities. This document creates an integrated approach that connects internal cultural policies with external cultural diplomacy, offering member states the flexibility to adapt these priorities to their specific national contexts.

Several distinctive typologies of cultural diplomacy practices work across different geographical and political contexts and demonstrate these theoretical frameworks in action.

State-orchestrated models demonstrate centralised governmental coordination of cultural projection. South Korea's systematic Hallyu strategy (Korean Wave), coordinated through the Korea Foundation using advanced digital platforms, exemplifies this approach's effectiveness. The phenomenal global success of K-pop group BTS generates billions in economic returns whilst transforming millions of international fans into informal cultural ambassadors who learn Korean, visit the country, and purchase Korean cultural products⁹⁸. North Korea employs a more authoritarian variant through state ideological mobilisation via spectacular displays like the Arirang Mass Games involving over 100,000 participants to project Juche ideology⁹⁹. Japan's "Cool Japan Initiative" strategically promotes anime, gastronomy, and sustainable design values as instruments of soft power maximisation¹⁰⁰.

Commercial and hybrid models reveal the complex interplay between state and market forces. The United States traditionally employed a decentralised commercial model where cultural influence operates through private sector synergy between Hollywood, Silicon Valley technology giants, and philanthropic foundations. However, Trump's 2025 "America First" doctrine has created a paradoxical situation where official government cultural diplomacy retreats through programme cuts¹⁰¹ whilst American commercial cultural influence continues expanding globally, creating an unprecedented disconnect between state and corporate cultural projection. The Middle East exemplifies a resource-to-culture transition model where Gulf states deploy massive oil wealth to construct cultural mega-

⁹⁸ Yao Yao Mize, "Rise of Cultural Diplomacy in East Asia," Pardee Atlas Journal of Global Affairs, Boston University, n.d., <https://sites.bu.edu/pardeeatlas/advancing-human-progress-initiative/rise-of-cultural-diplomacy-in-east-asia/>.

⁹⁹ Rüdiger Frank, „The Arirang Mass Games of North Korea", Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, 2013), <https://apjif.org/2013/11/50/rdiger-frank/4048/article>.

¹⁰⁰ Tets Kimura, "Cool Japan: Japan's Alternative Initiative to Soft Power" (paper presented at the Australian Political Studies Association (APSA) 2017 Annual Conference: Democracy and Populism: A New Age of Extremes?, Melbourne, Victoria, 25 September 2017).

¹⁰¹ Sareen Habeshian and Rebecca Falconer, "Trump Administration to Cut 92% of USAID Foreign Aid Contracts," Axios, February 27, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/02/27/trump-administration-to-cut-92-of-usaid-foreign-aid-contracts>.

projects (Louvre Abu Dhabi, Qatar National Museum¹⁰², NEOM of Saudi Arabia¹⁰³) that blend Islamic heritage with contemporary global art and architecture.

Reconciliation and reappropriation models address historical legacies and identity reconstruction. The decolonial reappropriation model manifests across Africa, where cultural diplomacy focuses on heritage repatriation¹⁰⁴, narrative reconstruction, and indigenous creative hubs that challenge Western-centric frameworks, utilising festivals like AFROPunk to project pan-African unity. Creative Australia actively engages in cultural diplomacy, collaborating with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and aligning with Australia's "Revive" Cultural Policy¹⁰⁵, built on five pillars including First Nations First and supporting international projects that share Australian stories, amplify First Nations voices¹⁰⁶, and build cultural understanding across borders through the Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Programme.

Brazil exemplifies an anthropophagic transformation model by "devouring" foreign cultural elements and transforming them into authentic national expressions¹⁰⁷. India operates through a civilisational soft power model that leverages ancient spiritual traditions alongside contemporary cultural industries

¹⁰² Alyn Griffiths, "Jean Nouvel Unveils National Museum of Qatar in Doha," *Dezeen*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/03/28/jean-nouvel-national-museum-qatar-cultural-architecture/>.

¹⁰³ NEOM is a planned futuristic city and region in Saudi Arabia, spanning 26,500 km² along the Red Sea, aimed at revolutionising urban life through sustainability, technology, and innovation. It is a \$500 billion project that includes diverse specialised zones such as The Line, a linear city, Oxagon, a floating industrial complex, and Trojena, a mountain tourism destination. Tamara Juburi, "Art and Diplomacy: Saudi Arabia's Cultural Renaissance in the Era of Vision 2030," Gulf International Forum, 2024, <https://gulfif.org/art-and-diplomacy-saudi-arabias-cultural-renaissance-in-the-era-of-vision-2030/>.

¹⁰⁴ Livia Gershon, "Looted Maqdala Treasures Returned to Ethiopia After 150 Years: A Nonprofit Foundation Purchased the Objects, Which Were Seized by British Troops in 1868, with the Aim of Restituting Them," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 10, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/british-foundation-returns-maqdala-treasures-looted-ethiopia-180978622/>.

¹⁰⁵ "A new National Cultural Policy," Office for the Arts, Australian Government, <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>.

¹⁰⁶ "On this day in 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau announced multiculturalism as official government policy—the first of its kind in the world—to recognise the contribution of cultural diversity and multicultural citizenship to Canada's social fabric. The diversity of Canadians is a fundamental characteristic of our heritage and identity. For generations, newcomers from around the world, from all backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths, cultures, and languages, have come to Canada with the hope of making it their home. Today, alongside First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, people from over 250 ethnic groups call Canada home and proudly celebrate their cultural heritage—they are at the centre of our success as a vibrant, prosperous, and progressive country." "Statement by the Prime Minister on the 50th Anniversary of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy," Prime Minister of Canada, October 8, 2021, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/10/08/statement-prime-minister-50th-anniversary-canadas-multiculturalism>.

¹⁰⁷ Cultural anthropophagy, a concept derived from Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade's 1928 manifesto, represents the strategic "devouring" and creative transformation of foreign cultural elements into authentic national expressions, enabling countries to absorb external influences whilst maintaining cultural autonomy and distinctiveness. Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra, "From a Latent to a 'Strong' Soft Power? The Evolution of India's Cultural Diplomacy," *Palgrave Communications* 2, 16091 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.91>.

like Bollywood cinema, supported by its extensive diaspora functioning as informal cultural ambassadors¹⁰⁸.

Beyond these state-centred and bilateral approaches, cultural diplomacy increasingly operates through multilateral platforms and transnational networks that transcend traditional diplomatic boundaries. At the European level, the Capital of Culture¹⁰⁹ programme exemplifies this multilateral approach, lying at the heart of EU cultural action and represents one of the most visible manifestations of the EU's dual focus on cultural and transnational spaces. The ECoC programme offers an opportunity for the formation and influence of transnational networks, particularly the potential of cities to support the EU's global strategy.

These transnational approaches manifest through several key platforms that have become central to contemporary cultural diplomacy practice.

Established in 1895, the Venice Biennale¹¹⁰ exemplifies national narrative strategies through pavilion-based exhibitions. Its multi-disciplinary format (Art, Cinema, Architecture, Music, Dance, Theatre) enables countries to express cultural identity through diverse artistic channels, consolidating Venice as a premier cultural diplomacy platform. Regulated by the Bureau International des Expositions since 1931, World Expos¹¹¹ address universal themes whilst facilitating interaction between governments, organisations, and citizens. These five-yearly events enable national pavilion construction and influence perceptions of participating nations through large-scale cultural projection. Bilateral Cultural Seasons represent a French innovation since 1985, coordinated by the French Institute across 60+ partner countries¹¹². Initially artistic-focused, these Seasons now encompass education, research, economics, and tourism, representing a standard cultural diplomacy model adopted globally for bilateral relations. International book fairs constitute another significant platform, representing complex events that unite publishing industry actors within concentrated spaces and serve as sites

¹⁰⁸ Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra, "From a latent to a 'strong' soft power? The evolution of India's cultural diplomacy," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 2 (2016): 16091, <https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201691>.

¹⁰⁹ The European Capital of Culture is a programme launched by the European Union in 1985 that annually designates one or more European cities to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and urban development through culture over the course of a dedicated year. The programme began as "European City of Culture" through an intergovernmental initiative (not yet a formal EU legal act); 1999 - the first formal EU decision: Decision 1419/1999/EC which established the legal framework for the period 2005-2019; 2006 - Decision 1622/2006/EC which replaced the 1999 decision, refining procedures and renaming the programme "European Capital of Culture"; 2014 - Decision 445/2014/EU for the period 2020-2033, European Union, "Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033," <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014D0445>.

¹¹⁰ "History," La Biennale di Venezia, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/history>.

¹¹¹ Bureau International des Expositions, <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/about-world-expos>.

¹¹² Ministère de la Culture, France, "Saisons culturelles croisées," <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/thematiques/europe-et-international/l-action-europeenne-et-internationale-du-ministere-de-la-culture/saisons-culturelles-croisees>.

for acquiring literary, cultural, and symbolic capital¹¹³. Transcending artistic functions, festivals become international interaction environments facilitating cultural dialogue and soft power projection. They enable crucial social debates whilst contributing to national image repositioning on global cultural maps, particularly in divided geopolitical contexts¹¹⁴. UNESCO platforms¹¹⁵ provide global mechanisms for cultural legitimisation through World Heritage listings, Intangible Heritage recognition, International Commemorations, and Creative Cities Network. These represent strategic cultural diplomacy instruments enabling states to transform local heritage into global recognition whilst amplifying international influence.

Having established the diverse typologies and operational frameworks of contemporary cultural diplomacy, it is essential to examine how these practices are undergoing fundamental transformation. The following analysis explores the paradigmatic shifts that are reshaping the very nature of cultural diplomatic engagement.

Paradigm shifts in cultural diplomacy

Contemporary cultural diplomacy has evolved into an intrinsically collaborative and polycentric phenomenon where cultural authority is continuously distributed and renegotiated amongst diverse actors. This transformation is driven by two interconnected processes that define contemporary practice: deinstitutionalisation - the shift from state-centred approaches to diverse non-state actors - and deterritorialisation - the reconfiguration of relationships between national, local, and global governance levels. These processes anticipate an era where national cultural representation increasingly emerges from complex ecosystems of co-production and co-validation rather than traditional state-orchestrated approaches.

Cultural projects now derive legitimacy through four interconnected components: artistic and professional credibility independent of institutional representation; institutional validation through global cultural circuits including festivals, museums, critics, and curators; audience acceptance

¹¹³ M.C. Villarino Pardo, "Strategies for transnational projection through international book fairs," *Neohelicon* 50 (2023): 133-153, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-023-00690-0>.

¹¹⁴ Milena Dragicevic Sestic, Ljiljana Rogac Mijatovic, and Nina Mihaljinac, eds., *Cultural Diplomacy: Arts, Festivals and Geopolitics* (Belgrade: Creative Europe Desk Serbia, Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, 2017), 127.

¹¹⁵ „The cultural heritage and the natural heritage are among the priceless and irreplaceable possessions, not only of each nation, but of mankind as a whole”, in UNESCO, "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention," WHC-97/2, February 1997, chap. Introduction, art. 1, <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/out/guide97.htm>.

determining public reception; and indirect democratic legitimacy through public funding mechanisms. This multifaceted legitimacy enables thematic flexibility, allowing projects to address subjects considered too sensitive for official diplomacy whilst operating between national and universal agendas.

The translation of culturally specific experiences for international audiences presents significant challenges, as demonstrated by several illuminating cases. The 2016 Brussels exhibition "Minorities in Visual Culture – Focus Romania"¹¹⁶ revealed perceptual differences between Romanian and Western European contexts regarding historical ethnic majorities and minorities. Similarly, the Romanian film director Radu Jude's film "Aferim!" (2015), exploring 19th-century Roma slavery, generated polarised reactions from celebratory international recognition to domestically racist responses, highlighting the complexity of addressing historical legacies through cultural mediums¹¹⁷. Contemporary cultural diplomacy operates within heightened geopolitical sensitivities where symbolic meanings can trigger unexpected controversies. Bogdan Rața's sculpture "Middle Way" exemplified this complexity when its colour was changed from red to blue during its 2018 Kiev installation to avoid potential associations with Soviet symbolism at the former Lenin monument site. The coincidental lack of hot water in Kiev neighbourhoods during the installation generated ironic local interpretations, demonstrating how external circumstances can reshape cultural reception¹¹⁸. High-profile commercial productions can inadvertently become diplomatic flashpoints, as evidenced by "The Interview" (2014), where Sony Pictures' comedy about assassinating Kim Jong-un prompted massive cyberattacks and international tensions¹¹⁹. Similarly, the 2024 Paris Olympics opening ceremony generated religious controversy when audiences misinterpreted a performance as parodying "The Last Supper," despite its actual inspiration from Dutch baroque painting¹²⁰. Recent controversies, such as Jamie Oliver's 2024 children's book withdrawal following criticism for inadequate representation of Australian First

¹¹⁶ The exhibition, produced by PostModernism Museum Romania, was first presented at La Poissonnerie in Brussels (August-October 2016). Cosmin Nasui, "Minorities in Visual Culture – Focus Romania," PostModernism Museum, <https://www.postmodernism.ro/minorities-in-visual-culture-focus-romania/>.

¹¹⁷ "Romanian Film 'Aferim!' Confronts Roots of Prejudice against Roma," Reuters, February 11, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-filmfestival-berlin-aferim/romanian-film-aferim-confronts-roots-of-prejudice-against-roma-idUSKBNOLF1P220150211>. The article concludes with contemporary information: "Modern Romania hosts approximately 2.5 million Roma, or roughly one-sixth of the population, and many of them are still victims of extreme poverty, prejudice and social exclusion."

¹¹⁸ Cosmin Nasui, *Moving Monuments / Monumente în mișcare* (Bucharest: PostModernism Museum Publishing, 2018).

¹¹⁹ Jen Yamato and Dominic Patten, "Sony Pulls 'The Interview' After Threats; Will Find Different Platform for Seth Rogen-James Franco Film," *Deadline*, December 17, 2014, <https://deadline.com/2014/12/sony-theater-owners-pull-the-interview-terror-threats-1201327612/>.

¹²⁰ Thomas Jolly, "Paris Olympic Opening Creator Defiant, Denies Last Supper Reference," *France24*, July 28, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240728-paris-olympic-opening-creator-defiant-over-controversial-show>.

Nations peoples¹²¹, illustrate how cultural representation extends beyond traditional diplomatic channels into commercial literature. These incidents demonstrate the expanding scope of cultural sensitivity requirements in globalised contexts. Daniel Knorr's "European Influenza" at the 2005 Venice Biennale—an empty Romanian pavilion—sparked debates about conceptual art's suitability for national representation, raising questions about artistic innovation versus public accessibility and the challenges of representing nations through avant-garde approaches¹²².

These varied examples illustrate a broader pattern of transformation in cultural diplomacy practice. The challenges encountered in cross-cultural translation and the controversies generated by symbolic meanings reflect deeper structural changes in how cultural authority is constituted and legitimated. This transformation manifests through the deinstitutionalisation of cultural diplomacy, as diverse non-state actors emerge to operate beyond traditional institutional frameworks. Contemporary cultural diplomacy now transcends exclusive state ownership, emerging from dynamic intersections between multiple institutional and non-institutional actors who reciprocally confer authority and credibility. Success depends not solely on official support but on navigating multiple validation ecosystems simultaneously, requiring careful consideration of local contexts, global agendas, and the potential for cultural translation to generate adverse reactions due to overlooked social, political, or religious sensitivities.

Contemporary cultural diplomacy has undergone transformation through two interconnected processes: deinstitutionalisation - the shift from state-centred approaches to diverse non-state actors - and deterritorialisation - the reconfiguration of relationships between national, local, and global governance levels. These dynamics have altered the landscape of international cultural relations, creating new forms of diplomatic engagement that transcend traditional institutional boundaries.

Gastrodiplomacy, paradiplomacy or diaspora diplomacy do not represent separate fields from cultural diplomacy but rather diversifications of traditional diplomatic instruments towards new spheres of human cultural experience. These "new diplomacies"¹²³ maintain the fundamental logic of building intercultural understanding through communicating values, practices, and worldviews, whilst

¹²¹ "Does Intent Matter?," Moral Maze, BBC Radio 4, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0024wbt>; Jamie Oliver, "Chef Jamie Oliver Withdraws Children's Book after Criticism from Indigenous Australians," AP News, November 11, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/oliver-britain-australia-first-nation-book-f44a87778a262ff9b2806123bae8ae6e>.

¹²² Cosmin Nasui, "The Miorița 'Nothingness' Will Be Exhibited in Venice: Daniel Knorr Ignites Dispute in the Art World," / "«Nimicul» mioritic va fi expus la Veneția: Daniel Knorr încinge disputa în lumea artelor," *Observator Cultural* (Romania), no. 260, March 17, 2005, 5-7.

¹²³ Jan Melissen theorises the new diplomacy as reform rather than fragmentation, identifying the evolution from rigid state-to-state interactions towards dynamic coalitions of multiple actors within polyilateral networks. Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jan Melissen, "Beyond the New Public Diplomacy," *Clingendael Paper No. 3* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', October 2011), 1-28.

expanding from exclusive governmental control to democratised and participatory forms of cultural representation. This evolution reflects the transition from exclusively governmental diplomacy to democratised forms where legitimacy no longer derives solely from state authority but from dynamic intersections between professional artistic validation, community acceptance, and impact within global cultural ecosystems.

Diaspora diplomacy exemplifies this deinstitutionalisation through national strategies that actively leverage diasporic communities for public diplomacy, cultural exchange, international business, and economic development. In an interconnected world, "network centrality"¹²⁴ becomes vital, with states positioning themselves as central hubs in critical networks whilst mobilising and creating new connections. India systematically cultivates its Silicon Valley diaspora through programmes like "Pravasi Bharatiya Divas," connecting Indian-origin entrepreneurs with domestic startups and universities, thereby facilitating knowledge and capital transfer whilst creating new networks between Silicon Valley, Bangalore, and other global technology centres¹²⁵. Australia's Advance¹²⁶ exemplifies strategic network positioning as the country's only formal global diaspora network, building centrality through industry-specific groups and government partnerships to leverage Australian diaspora's economic and cultural influence. Estonia's e-Residency programme, launched in 2014, represents an innovative approach that transcends physical boundaries by offering digital national identity to anyone worldwide, creating a unique "global diaspora" of over 100,000 digital residents from 181 countries who have established over 27,000 Estonian enterprises¹²⁷. "Global Ireland 2025" strategy systematically defines diaspora through "citizenship, heritage and affinity," positioning Irish culture as a competitive advantage for global engagement¹²⁸. Kosovo's diaspora generates predominantly positive imagery through individual successes in sport and music, contrasting with negative domestic perceptions, yet this cultural capital remains systematically underexploited due to lack of coordination

¹²⁴ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "A Grand Strategy of Network Centrality," in *America's Path Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, ed. Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2012), 43.

¹²⁵ Sean Randolph, "Silicon Valley Expats Spur Innovation in India," *YaleGlobal Online*, September 2, 2010, <https://archive-yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/silicon-valley-expats-spur-innovation-india>.

¹²⁶ Advance Global Australians, a non-profit organisation built on a public-private partnership model, with a community of 25,000 members spanning over 90 countries, aiming to "transform a million Australians abroad into a powerful network of knowledge and resources," <https://advance.org>.

¹²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, "The Global Estonian Diaspora," <https://vm.ee/en/activity/global-estonian-diaspora/aim-global-estonian-diaspora>; Hannah Brown, "Estonian E-Residency Community Reaches 100,000 Members," Republic of Estonia E-Residency, February 22, 2023, <https://www.e-resident.gov.ee/blog/posts/estonian-e-residency-community-reaches-100000-members/>.

¹²⁸ "The Irish Times View on the Diaspora Strategy: Extending a Hand to the 'Global Irish'," *The Irish Times*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/the-irish-times-view-on-the-diaspora-strategy-extending-a-hand-to-the-global-irish-1.4412837>; "Promoting Ireland through Our Culture," Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-foreign-affairs/publications/promoting-ireland-through-our-culture/>.

between state institutions and successful diaspora members¹²⁹. Baltic countries have developed active diaspora engagement policies since the mid-2000s, combining focus on "old diaspora" (1940s emigrants) with "new diaspora" generated by EU accession, facilitated through formal consultative bodies like Latvia's Diaspora Advisory Council, whilst Nordic countries have adopted more restrained approaches except for Denmark's recent "Diaspora: A resource for Denmark" initiative¹³⁰.

Deterritorialisation manifests through paradiplomacy, where non-central governments engage in international relations through permanent or ad-hoc contacts with foreign entities to promote socio-economic or cultural dimensions of their constitutional competencies¹³¹. This phenomenon creates a multi-stratified diplomatic ecosystem where boundaries between local and global, national and transnational blur, generating new modalities of cultural cooperation and influence. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), founded in 2004, represents over 240,000 members globally through regional offices in Barcelona, Brasov, Brussels, Istanbul, Jakarta, and other cities, facilitating cultural exchanges and promoting urban cultural governance independently or complementarily to national state diplomacy¹³². The UNESCO Creative Cities Network encompasses nearly 300 cities from approximately 90 countries developing transnational cultural partnerships across eight creative domains: architecture, crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music¹³³, without necessary national government mediation. ASEAN Smart Cities Network¹³⁴ exemplifies innovative paradiplomacy by connecting 26 pilot cities across ten member states, facilitating direct collaboration between local administrations and private entities whilst bypassing traditional government-to-government channels for sustainable urban development projects.

This deterritorialisation manifests concretely across European contexts, with Romanian cities exemplifying the transition from national to transnational cultural positioning. Sibiu achieved dual international recognition as the first Romanian European Capital of Culture in 2007 and European

¹²⁹ Resul Sinani, "Diaspora as a Communicating Actor in Public Diplomacy Compared to Public Government Diplomacy in the Case of Kosovo," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 2015): 269, <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/ajis/article/view/7167>.

¹³⁰ Ieva Birka and Didzis Klavins, "Diaspora Diplomacy: Nordic and Baltic Perspective," *Diaspora Studies*, November 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2019.1693861>.

¹³¹ Noe Cornago, "Diplomacy and Paradiplomacy in the Redefinition of International Security: Dimensions of Conflict and Co-operation," *Regional & Federal Studies* 9, no. 1 (1999): 40-57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597569908421070>; Rodrigo Tavares, "Forget the Nation-State: Cities Will Transform the Way We Conduct Foreign Affairs," World Economic Forum, October 4, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2016/10/forget-the-nation-state-cities-will-transform-the-way-we-conduct-foreign-affairs/>.

¹³² United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), "About Us," <https://uclg.org/about-us/>.

¹³³ UNESCO, "Creative Cities Network," <https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities>.

¹³⁴ Melinda Martinus, "ASEAN Cities: The Rise of Paradiplomacy," ISEAS Commentary, no. 52, April 22, 2020, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/asean-cities-the-rise-of-paradiplomacy/>.

Gastronomic Region in 2019, positioning itself alongside regions like Catalonia and Lombardy. Cluj-Napoca exemplifies the most complex cultural diplomacy portfolio, serving as European Youth Capital (2015), UNESCO City of Film (2021) - becoming the first Romanian city in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network - and reaching the finals for European Capital of Innovation 2020. Timișoara assumed the European Capital of Culture designation in 2023, whilst Iași joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as a City of Literature in 2023, recognising its contributions to Romanian literary heritage.

Paradiplomacy extends beyond cultural promotion to conflict resolution applications, serving as an instrument for reducing transnational dimensions of ethnic conflicts. The Carinthia-Slovenia relationship demonstrates how cross-border contacts of Slovene minorities contributed to diminishing bilateral tensions between Austria and Yugoslavia during the 1970s-1980s. Similarly, the Tyrol-Bolzano experience illustrates how recognising special rights for Austrian minorities and developing tolerance regimes for strengthening connections between Tyrolean populations across state borders led to periodic joint meetings of provincial chambers belonging to different states, offering practical instruments for ethnopolitical accommodation through cultural rights recognition and self-governance arrangements rather than full state sovereignty¹³⁵.

Beyond territorial governance, contemporary non-state cultural diplomacy increasingly operates through thematic specialisations that leverage specific cultural domains as diplomatic instruments.

Gastrodiplomacy represents a form of public diplomacy that combines cultural diplomacy, culinary diplomacy, and national branding to render foreign culture tangible through taste and touch, transforming soft power resources into national brand recognition¹³⁶. Traditional culinary practices constitute an increasingly significant component of intangible heritage lists, with over fifty such practices inscribed on UNESCO lists—not the dishes themselves, but the cultural modes of cultivation, preparation, and consumption transmitted across generations. These practices promote varied diets that respect ecosystems and maintain genetic biodiversity whilst creating opportunities for exchange and dialogue that strengthen social cohesion¹³⁷.

The legitimisation of gastrodiplomacy achieved significant momentum when France's traditional gastronomic meal became part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage in November 2010¹³⁸. This

¹³⁵ Noe Cornago, "Diplomacy and Paradiplomacy in the Redefinition of International Security: Dimensions of Conflict and Co-operation," *Regional & Federal Studies* 9, no. 1 (1999): 40-57.

¹³⁶ Paul Rockower, "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8, no. 3 (2012): 235.

¹³⁷ Lucia Iglesias Kuntz, "Food and Intangible Heritage, a Flavourful Relationship," *UNESCO Courier*, April 2, 2025, <https://courier.unesco.org/en/articles/food-and-intangible-heritage-flavourful-relationship>.

¹³⁸ UNESCO, "Gastronomic Meal of the French," *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 2010, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>.

recognition prompted the French government to adopt explicit gastrodipomatic strategies, with Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announcing "gastrono-diplomacy" as a new diplomatic specialty in October 2014¹³⁹. The subsequent 20 measures for promoting French gastronomy included the "Goût de France / Good France" initiative, annually mobilising over 1,000 chefs across five continents. Italy demonstrates systematic culinary diplomacy through the Golden Tagliatella preserved in Bologna's Chamber of Commerce, which serves as the official standard for traditional pasta dimensions - 8 millimetres when cooked, equivalent to one 12,270th of the Asinelli Tower's height - establishing culinary authority comparable to the official metre at the Paris National Archives¹⁴⁰.

Romania's interwar gastrodipomacy is exemplified by "Les bons plats roumains" (1937), published by the National Tourism Office for the Paris International Exhibition, illustrated by artist Lena Constante and designed as a cultural and tourism promotion instrument. This work now holds contemporary significance through its inclusion as historical evidence in the European Commission dossier for Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) protection for "Traditional Carp Roe Salad," demonstrating the evolution from cultural representation to legal protection of culinary heritage¹⁴¹.

Governmental gastrodipomatic programmes proliferated throughout the 2000s, beginning with Thailand's Global Thai programme in 2002, followed by South Korea's Korean Cuisine to the World campaign (2009) supported by a \$40 million budget and establishment of the World Institute of Kimchi (2010), Taiwan's "All in Good Taste" campaign (2010), Malaysia's "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" programme (2010), and Hillary Clinton's Diplomatic Culinary Partnership incorporating gastrodipomacy into the US State Department (2012). Peru's evolution from failed UNESCO candidacy for entire Peruvian gastronomy (2008-2010) to successful ceviche recognition (2023) demonstrates how focusing on specific, well-delimited culinary practices can transform cultural heritage into effective soft power instruments.

¹³⁹ However, Fabius's statements generated controversy, being criticised by parts of the academic community for France's alleged pretension to have "invented" gastrodipomacy, despite earlier Asian initiatives. Juyan Zhang, "The Food of War: Gastrodipomacy in Practice," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 10, no. 4 (2015): 341-359.

¹⁴⁰ Oretta Zanini De Vita, *Encyclopedia of Pasta*, trans. Maureen B. Fant, foreword by Carol Field (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 278.

¹⁴¹ "Publication of an Application for Registration of a Name Pursuant to Article 50(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Quality Schemes for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs," *Official Journal of the European Union* C 222/09 (June 11, 2021), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3AC2021%2F222%2F05>.

Whilst gastrodiploamacy operates through sustained cultural engagement and gradual identity construction, sports diplomacy¹⁴² demonstrates how these diversified diplomatic instruments can function through concentrated moments of high visibility that either bridge or expose political divisions.

Sports diplomacy manifests through cultural programmes accompanying major sporting events and strategic team formations that transcend political divisions. Ping-pong diplomacy originated in 1971 when the American table tennis team's unexpected invitation to China broke two decades of diplomatic isolation¹⁴³, demonstrating how sport can serve as a preliminary channel for broader political rapprochement between hostile nations. This reconciliation model found contemporary expression in the unified Korean women's ice hockey team at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, which marked the first Olympic unified team between North and South Korea¹⁴⁴, following historical precedents of East and West German cooperation between 1952 and 1964.

However, sports diplomacy can equally expose rather than bridge political divisions. The 1980 Moscow Olympics boycott, led by President Jimmy Carter with approximately 60 countries protesting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, represents the largest Olympic boycott in history and demonstrates how sporting events become instruments of political protest¹⁴⁵. Similarly, the 2022 Qatar World Cup exemplified the tension between sports diplomacy and cultural values when FIFA banned "OneLove" armbands intended to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion¹⁴⁶, ultimately revealing how sporting events can become battlegrounds for competing moral and political values in international relations.

These paradigm shifts in deinstitutionalisation and deterritorialisation create both opportunities and imperatives for new forms of diplomatic engagement. As traditional boundaries dissolve and new actors emerge, contemporary cultural diplomacy must respond dynamically to global challenges through innovative mechanisms that transcend conventional frameworks.

¹⁴² "Culture and sport can be enablers of our strategic priorities in enlargement, but also in global engagement, and it is in our interest to use them as such." Glenn Micallef, Commissioner, "Hearing of Glenn Micallef, Commissioner Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport," Committee on Culture and Education, European Parliament, Brussels, 4 November 2024, 26.

¹⁴³ "Ping-Pong Diplomacy," American Experience, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), March 5, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/china-ping-pong/>.

¹⁴⁴ Virgilio Neto, "Olympic Spirit: The Story of Korea's Unified Ice Hockey Team at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics," Olympics.com, April 28, 2021, <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/olympic-spirit-the-story-of-korea-s-unified-ice-hockey-team-at-the-2018-pyeongch>.

¹⁴⁵ "The 1980 Moscow Olympics Boycott," Wilson Center, February 27, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-1980-moscow-olympics-boycott>.

¹⁴⁶ Graham Dunbar, "World Cup Captains Want to Wear Rainbow Armbands in Qatar," Associated Press, September 21, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/soccer-sports-middle-east-international-09645ca4a5fe855f0c419c67ba4fecce>.

Cultural Diplomacy as dynamic response

Building upon these paradigmatic transformations in deinstitutionalisation and deterritorialisation, contemporary cultural diplomacy thus configures itself as an adaptive ecosystem that responds dynamically to emerging global challenges, from protecting heritage in conflict zones to integrating culture into the sustainable development agenda and recognising the spiritual values of natural spaces. The analysed experiences - from SUCHO's digital mobilisation to strategic initiatives such as the Cultural Deal for Europe and #Culture2030Goal, from climate ambassador programmes to local projects valorising natural-cultural heritage - demonstrate that the power of cultural diplomacy resides not only in its capacity to promote national identities, but in its ability to articulate collective responses to systemic crises that transcend traditional boundaries. This evolution marks a paradigm shift: from a cultural diplomacy centred on national representation towards one that functions as an instrument for building global resilience, in which cultural heritage becomes both the object and the means of an integrated diplomacy that connects security, sustainability and identity within a coherent framework for international action.

Citizen diplomacy

Ljiljana Rogac Mijatovic, Associate Professor at the University of Arts in Belgrade, defines "citizen diplomacy" as "bottom-up" cultural diplomacy that transcends exclusive governmental roles to include civil society organisations, artists, and universities as independent actors with greater credibility and specialist knowledge¹⁴⁷. This approach builds upon Louise Diamond and John McDonald's multi-track diplomacy theory, which extends Joseph Montville's original 1982 distinction between Track One (official, governmental action) and Track Two (unofficial, non-governmental action) for conflict resolution. Within multi-track diplomacy theory, citizen diplomacy is positioned as Track Four, defined as "citizen-to-citizen exchange programmes of all types, including scientific, cultural, academic, educational, student, film, musical, artistic, sporting and youth exchanges"¹⁴⁸. Very interesting how

¹⁴⁷ Ljiljana Rogac Mijatovic, "Implications of Multiple Identity Layers for Cultural Diplomacy of Serbia," in *Cultural Diplomacy: Arts, Festivals and Geopolitics*, ed. Milena Dragicevic Sestic, Ljiljana Rogac Mijatovic, and Nina Mihaljinac (Belgrade: Creative Europe Desk Serbia, Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia, Faculty of Dramatic Arts Belgrade, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, 2017), 203-208.

¹⁴⁸ John W. McDonald, "Multi-Track Diplomacy," *Beyond Intractability*, eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, September 2003, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/multi-track-diplomacy>.

Nigeria exemplifies this approach - it has officially declared citizen diplomacy as strategic foreign policy response¹⁴⁹.

Sister Cities International, founded in 1956 through President Eisenhower's people-to-people initiative, maintains over 1,800 partnerships between American communities and cities across 140+ countries¹⁵⁰. Celebrity diplomacy proves particularly effective, with Bono's ONE and (RED) organisations generating over \$750 million for AIDS programmes in Africa¹⁵¹, whilst UNESCO Peace Artist Marcus Miller promoted intercultural understanding through his "Goree" composition addressing slavery's legacy¹⁵². John Wood's "Room to Read" builds libraries and schools in developing countries without direct government involvement¹⁵³. Glenn Cowan's accidental encounter with Chinese table tennis players in 1971 led to the first American delegation visiting China since 1949, demonstrating how spontaneous citizen interactions can reshape diplomatic relations through what became known as 'ping-pong diplomacy'.

Contemporary citizen diplomacy extends beyond traditional cultural exchange to encompass climate action and sustainable development, as demonstrated by the Romania's 40 European Climate Pact Ambassadors¹⁵⁴ - including students, architects, lawyers, and environmental activists—acting as intermediaries between citizens, experts and decision-makers to facilitate climate education and inspire action towards the EU's 2050 net-zero emissions goal.

Digital citizen diplomacy demonstrates particular effectiveness in heritage protection, as evidenced by Romania's 'La Blouse Roumaine' movement. Beginning as a 2012 Facebook community celebrating traditional Romanian blouses, the initiative evolved into a global advocacy network

¹⁴⁹ S.I. Odoh and David M.E. Nwogbaga, "Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Citizen Diplomacy in the Conduct of Nigeria's Foreign Policy," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 10 (October 2014): 9-14.

¹⁵⁰ Sister Cities International - About Us, <https://sistercities.org/about-us/>.

¹⁵¹ ONE Campaign, "Bono," February 22, 2024, <https://www.one.org/us/person/bono/>; Simon Anholt, "Bono, Public Diplomacy and 'Brand Africa'," *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, May 25, 2006, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/bono-public-diplomacy-and-%E2%80%98brand-africa%E2%80%9999>; Bono, *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (New York: Knopf, 2022).

¹⁵² UNESCO, "Marcus Miller: singing freedom," March 26, 2013, updated April 20, 2013, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/marcus-miller-singing-freedom>; International Finance Corporation, "S2E7: Marcus Miller: A Legend of Jazz, and UNESCO Artist for Peace," *Creative Development with IFC*, 2023, <https://www.ifc.org/en/podcasts/creative-development/2023/cdp-s2e7>.

¹⁵³ "John Wood," Room to Read, <https://www.roomtoread.org/team/john-wood/>.

¹⁵⁴ Oana Grecea, "Romania has strengthened its team of European Climate Pact Ambassadors," *Revista Biz*, <https://www.revistabiz.ro/romania-si-a-consolidat-echipa-de-ambasadori-ai-pactului-climatic-european/>; "Meet our ambassadors (40)," *European Climate Pact*, https://climate-pact.europa.eu/meet-community/climate-pact-ambassadors-ro?prefLang=ro&f%5B0%5D=world_world%3A158&page=0; The European Climate Pact Secretariat is coordinated at European level by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action and coordinated in Romania by REPER21: "Satellite event: Resilient Reșița," *European Climate Pact*, https://climate-pact.europa.eu/articles-and-events/events/satellite-event-resilient-resita-community-adaptation-climate-change-2024-01-23_en.

spanning six continents. The community's #GiveCredit campaign successfully challenged international fashion houses—compelling Louis Vuitton to withdraw Romanian-inspired designs in 2024—whilst securing EU Creative Europe funding for heritage protection projects¹⁵⁵. This progression from cultural celebration to international advocacy illustrates how citizen diplomacy can transform cultural appreciation into effective heritage protection mechanisms.

This democratisation of cultural diplomatic practice extends beyond human agency to encompass the protection and digital transformation of cultural heritage itself, where technology becomes both tool and battleground for cultural preservation.

Heritage diplomacy

Transversal digital technologies including IoT, AI, blockchain, and VR fundamentally transform cultural heritage documentation and conservation, creating new collection management opportunities. IoT systems enable real-time environmental monitoring whilst computer vision identifies artefact characteristics with remarkable precision¹⁵⁶. A compelling example is provided by the AI project for Rome's Colosseum which utilises algorithms to identify cracks, erosion patterns and structural deterioration with microscopic precision, enabling experts to implement targeted restoration interventions. Simultaneously, AI-powered OCR systems convert ancient manuscripts into digital text, offering possibilities for historical reinterpretation whilst democratising access to knowledge.

Complementing these AI technologies, blockchain technology offers promising conservation options. In China, 22 cultural heritage institutions across 9 provinces use blockchain to authenticate and digitally preserve both immovable heritage (monuments, caves) and movable heritage (paintings, sculptures, manuscripts), ensuring verifiable provenance and permanent conservation. These blockchain standards were included in UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Innovation Case

¹⁵⁵ "Andreea Tanasescu ('La blouse roumaine'): Artificial intelligence can harm the traditional," Stiripesurse.ro, July 2, 2025, https://www.stiripesurse.ro/andreea-tanasescu-la-blouse-roumaine-artificial-intelligence-can-harm-the-traditional_3736628.html; "Inspiration Or Appropriation? A Win For Romania As Louis Vuitton Pulls Folk Items From Collection," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 1, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-folk-dress-credit-louis-vuitton-ia/33013244.html>; "Founder of 'La Blouse Roumaine' movement: Opening Romania as international textile tourism destination," Stiripesurse.ro, June 24, 2019, https://www.stiripesurse.ro/founder-of-la-blouse-roumaine-movement-opening-romania-as-international-textile-tourism-destination_1361714.html; "Romania's culture minister asks Louis Vuitton to acknowledge a traditional blouse inspired items," AP News, June 4, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/romania-louis-vuitton-blouse-fashion-4ce60649a33563da0475564ced1d0aaf>. See also the project "Digital Nomads in the Village" by Formare Culturala platform, documented experiences of cultural heritage professionals through video interviews, exploring how cultural operators, artists, anthropologists, lawyers, sociologists, communicators and entrepreneurs develop creative projects in rural communities, emphasising transdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge transfer as essential elements for rural cultural development, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwqlrtThmkWQDPQq3FahBiXV30_Tawva

¹⁵⁶ Mostafa Ibrahim, "AI for Art & Heritage Conservation," Ultralytics, August 14, 2024, <https://www.ultralytics.com/blog/ai-in-art-and-cultural-heritage-conservation>.

Repository in 2023¹⁵⁷. Moving beyond mere conservation, virtual reconstruction enables the digital recreation of lost¹⁵⁸ or damaged heritage sites with remarkable precision, allowing scholars to visualize how structures appeared in their original state based on archaeological evidence and historical records¹⁵⁹. Digital "reenactment" transcends static reconstruction by creating dynamic, interactive experiences where users can participate in historical events, witness ancient ceremonies, and explore alternative scenarios that bring the past to life¹⁶⁰. Virtual museums create "personalised, immersive, interactive experiences that enhance our understanding of the world around us," using vision, narrative and interaction to enable genuine time travel experiences¹⁶¹.

These technological advances pave the way for new economic models in cultural heritage. Fractional ownership through blockchain¹⁶² democratises access to art and heritage investments¹⁶³. Raphael Coin (RAPH), launched in 2025, "tokenises" Raphael's "Recto: Study for the Battle of the Milvian Bridge," making art ownership accessible, secure and transparent whilst enabling global co-ownership of shared cultural history¹⁶⁴. Similarly, the Museum of Astronomy and Related Sciences in Rio de Janeiro is exploring (in 2025) the tokenisation of the renowned Escadaria Selaron artwork, where the previous management plan (2019) attracted over 500 collaborative funders, and viability

¹⁵⁷ Liu, X., Dong, F., Shui, W. et al., "Blockchain in digital cultural heritage resources: technological integration, consensus mechanisms, and future directions," *npj Heritage Science* 13, no. 235 (2025), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s40494-025-01818-4>.

¹⁵⁸ Bruno Rodriguez-Garcia, Henar Guillen-Sanz, David Checa, and Andres Bustillo, "A systematic review of virtual 3D reconstructions of Cultural Heritage in immersive Virtual Reality," *Multimedia Tools and Applications* 83 (2024): 89743–89793, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-024-18700-3>.

¹⁵⁹ Francesco Fassi, Alessandro Mandelli, Simone Teruggi, Fabrizio Rechichi, Fausta Fiorillo, and Cristiana Achille, "VR for Cultural Heritage: A VR-WEB-BIM for the Future Maintenance of Milan's Cathedral," in *Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Computer Graphics. AVR 2016, Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol. 9769 (Springer, 2016), 139–157, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/55259721.pdf>.

¹⁶⁰ Anton Bogdanovych, Juan A. Rodriguez-Aguilar, Simeon Simoff, and Alon Cohen, "Authentic Interactive Reenactment of Cultural Heritage with 3D Virtual Worlds and Artificial Intelligence," *Applied Artificial Intelligence* 24, no. 6 (2010): 617–647, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08839514.2010.492172>.

¹⁶¹ Alessandra Antonaci, Michela Ott, and Francesca Pozzi, "Virtual Museums, Cultural Heritage Education and 21st Century Skills," *eLearning Papers* 35 (2013), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258629938_VIRTUAL_MUSEUMS_CULTURAL_HERITAGE_EDUCATION_AND_21ST_CENTURY_SKILLS.

¹⁶² Fractional ownership is a system whereby multiple individuals can simultaneously own shares in a single high-value asset (art, property, investments), with each owner having rights proportional to their stake in the respective asset.

¹⁶³ Federica Rubino, Deborah Agostino, and Davide Spallazzo, "Strategizing blockchain adoption in public cultural services: a comprehensive scoping review," *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 38, no. 1 (2025): 77–97, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-12-2023-0383>.

¹⁶⁴ Raphael Coin Tokenizes Renaissance Art on the Blockchain in a Historic First." *Crypto Daily*. 24 April 2025. <https://cryptodaily.co.uk/2025/04/raphael-coin-tokenizes-renaissance-art-on-the-blockchain-in-a-historic-first>.

assessments are now underway for financing models that combine cultural heritage conservation with crowdfunding mechanisms¹⁶⁵.

Digital fragilities

While these technological advances offer unprecedented opportunities for cultural heritage preservation and democratisation, they simultaneously create new vulnerabilities that must be carefully addressed.

The inherent vulnerability of digital spaces raises concerns about unintended consequences including echo chambers, fake news, and deliberate information manipulation by state and non-state actors. Oxford professor Corneliu Bjola's "4E digital reflexive control funnel" model—entice, engage, elevate, exploit—provides a framework for understanding disinformation campaign intensity and developing effective countermeasures¹⁶⁶.

These digital manipulation frameworks reveal a deeper challenge in contemporary information warfare: the inadequacy of traditional fact-based responses to sophisticated psychological operations. Research by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre demonstrates that countering "emotional innumeracy" - where populations systematically overestimate perceived threats - requires approaches that transcend mere factual correction. Simply presenting contradictory data proves ineffective because it fails to address underlying anxieties. These overestimations must be understood as diagnostic indicators of genuine public concerns that shape political discourse. Contemporary persuasion depends not on factual accuracy alone, but on plausible scenarios delivered through trusted messengers. This dynamic explains why cultural institutions and artists often prove more effective than governmental sources in countering authoritarian propaganda - their perceived independence enhances their credibility as defenders of democratic culture against manipulation¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁵ "MAST Colloquia discute a tokenização de ativos físicos como forma de preservação do patrimônio cultural," Museu de Astronomia e Ciências Afins (MAST), April 10, 2025, <https://www.gov.br/mast/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2025/abril/mast-colloquia-discute-a-tokenizacao-de-ativos-fisicos-como-forma-de-preservacao-do-patrimonio-cultural>.

¹⁶⁶ Bjola's 4E framework identifies: *Entice* (adapting messages to attract audiences), *Engage* (exploiting sensitive issues), *Elevate* (accelerating dissemination through botnets), and *Exploit* (pursuing constructive or destructive political goals through calls to action). Corneliu Bjola, "Propaganda as reflexive control: The digital dimension," in *Countering Online Propaganda and Extremism: The Dark Side of Digital Diplomacy*, eds. Corneliu Bjola and James Pamment (London: Routledge, 2019), 23-26.

¹⁶⁷ David Mair, Laura Smillie, Giovanni La Placa, Florian Schwendinger, Milena Raykovska, Zsuzsanna Pasztor, and Rene Van Bavel, "Understanding Our Political Nature: How to Put Knowledge and Reason at the Heart of Political Decision-Making," EUR 29783 EN (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019), <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC117161>.

Digital cultural heritage repositories create a false sense of security through their sophisticated infrastructure, fostering dangerous complacency that undermines proper security protocols. This overconfidence proves problematic when repositories face sophisticated adversaries seeking to manipulate or destroy cultural heritage during conflicts¹⁶⁸.

Against this backdrop of digital vulnerabilities, a new generation is radically redefining its relationship with cultural heritage. Today's youth exercise cultural agency fundamentally differently than previous generations through digitalisation and globalisation. Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have transformed them from cultural consumers into active creators who produce content¹⁶⁹, establish trends and influence global cultural tastes without geographical limitations. This generation practises what scholars term "remix culture," combining diverse cultural elements innovatively whilst streaming and algorithms create personalised cultural experiences. Many monetise their cultural passions as influencers or cultural entrepreneurs. UNESCO emphasises intercultural dialogue's importance, noting that by 2030, 60% of urban populations will be under 18, making young people's intercultural capabilities essential for sustainable development¹⁷⁰.

Against this backdrop of digital vulnerabilities, cultural content itself has become a primary battlefield for influence, where entertainment platforms function as vehicles for geopolitical strategy.

Streaming diplomacy and narrative wars

These digital vulnerabilities become particularly acute when cultural content itself becomes a battlefield for influence. The same platforms that democratise cultural expression also enable unprecedented forms of manipulation, transforming entertainment into geopolitical strategy and audiences into unwitting participants in narrative wars.

Digital soft power means that no one holds a monopoly—every country can export culture through digital platforms, from Bollywood dance challenges to Nordic noir series, from Korean beauty tutorials to Brazilian carnival footage. Yet algorithms decide what culture billions of users consume, often prioritising content that generates engagement over cultural authenticity or diversity, and cultural

¹⁶⁸ Christina Dinh Nguyen, "Digital cultural heritage in the crossfire of conflict: cyber threats and cybersecurity perspectives," Insights: The UKSG Journal 37, no. 1 (2024), <https://insights.uksg.org/articles/10.1629/uksg.647>.

¹⁶⁹ Anu Kajamaa and Kristiina Kumpulainen, "Young people, digital mediation, and transformative agency, special issue (part 1)," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 26, no. 3 (2019): 211-230, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10749039.2019.1652653>.

¹⁷⁰ UNESCO, "Thematic Factsheet | Youth and Empowerment," May 31, 2021, <https://en.unesco.org/culture-development/transversal-approaches/youth-and-empowerment>.

success is measured in views, streams and viral trends. This fundamental shift has transformed not only how culture spreads, but who controls its dissemination. The mechanisms of this new digital influence operate through sophisticated forms of manipulation. Algorithmic power functions through invisible censorship, operating via shadow-banning for sensitive political content, whilst TikTok "cannot find" videos¹⁷¹ about Hong Kong or Xinjiang, and algorithms "accidentally" promote certain geopolitical perspectives¹⁷². Diplomatic power has thus shifted from political chancelleries to content creators and algorithms, fundamentally redefining how global cultural influence is built and propagated.

Perhaps most concerning is the systematic fabrication of cultural narratives through coordinated deception, weaponising cultural heritage, hijacking hashtags. These tactics have fundamentally altered the nature of international conflict itself. In current geopolitical conflicts, cultural diplomacy no longer merely means promoting identity, but actively participating in a "war of narratives." Actors no longer fight solely with weapons, but also with stories, symbols, memes, hashtags and documentaries.

The democratising potential of digital platforms extends beyond individual creators to organised fan communities that transcend entertainment boundaries to engage in coordinated political action. K-pop superfans exemplify this phenomenon through sophisticated online mobilisation tactics, as demonstrated during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests when they systematically hijacked right-wing hashtags with fan content, overwhelmed police surveillance apps with fancams, and coordinated massive fundraising campaigns that raised over \$1 million within 25 hours to match BTS's donation to the movement¹⁷³.

"Inauthentic Behaviour" is the term used by Facebook/Meta for coordinated networks of false accounts attempting to manipulate public opinion. In 2020, Facebook shut down over 100 pages that presented themselves as American local news sites but were actually operated from North Macedonia and promoted electoral disinformation¹⁷⁴. Complementing these fabricated news outlets, trend

¹⁷¹ Foreign Policy, "TikTok Battles Ban Calls Over Privacy and Censorship Concerns," March 29, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/12/tiktok-security-concerns-china-european-union-social-media/>; "TikTok exec says she 'misspoke' in hearing about the app censoring Xinjiang content," CNN Business, November 6, 2020, <https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/11/06/tech/tiktok-xinjiang-censorship-uk-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁷² Mattia Samory, Olga Abramova, and Kathleen M. Carley, "Analyzing Russia's propaganda tactics on Twitter using mixed methods network analysis and natural language processing: a case study of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine," EPJ Data Science 13, no. 42 (2024), <https://epidatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epids/s13688-024-00479-w>.

¹⁷³ Dymple Leong, "K-pop 'stans' unleashed: Hijacking hashtags for social action," The Interpreter, June 25, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/k-pop-stans-unleashed-hijacking-hashtags-social-action>.

¹⁷⁴ Craig Silverman, J. Lester Feder, Saska Cvetkovska, and Aubrey Belford, "Macedonia's Pro-Trump Fake News Industry Had American Links, And Is Under Investigation For Possible Russia Ties," BuzzFeed News, July 18, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/american-conservatives-fake-news-macedonia-paris-wade-libert>.

hijacking involves appropriating popular hashtags to insert political messages and transforming cultural events into propaganda platforms¹⁷⁵. Memes also become weaponised through the Internet Research Agency in St Petersburg, which created memes about race and politics in the US to deepen divisions, whilst fake accounts promote negative stereotypes about other cultures through "innocent" humour, generating national security threats through deep fake disinformation messages¹⁷⁶.

Against this backdrop of coordinated deception and manufactured authenticity, the role of legitimate knowledge intermediaries becomes increasingly critical. Organisations and individuals functioning as honest knowledge brokers can significantly enhance the trustworthiness of cultural content and democratic discourse by maintaining transparency in their operations, acknowledging community values, and actively engaging diverse stakeholders. These knowledge brokers and boundary organisations prove essential in well-designed information ecosystems, serving as intermediaries between cultural practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to build informed communities around cultural policy challenges. In the context of digital cultural diplomacy, such intermediaries—including independent cultural journalists, academic institutions, and transparent cultural organisations—offer alternatives to both state propaganda and commercial algorithmic manipulation, creating spaces for authentic cultural dialogue that resists weaponisation¹⁷⁷.

Cultural heritage becomes weaponised in these fabricated narratives. Troll farms contribute to the fabrication of history¹⁷⁸ - Russia created false documentaries¹⁷⁹ about the "Nazification" of Ukraine to justify invasion, promoted falsified documentaries claiming Ukrainian folk traditions were actually Russian, and systematically appropriated Ukrainian cultural symbols, recontextualising them within

¹⁷⁵ as in the Russian campaigns that hijacked hashtags such as #UnitedForUkraine to promote pro-Kremlin narratives and polarise public debates. Dominique Geissler, Dominik Bär, Nicolas Pröllochs, and Stefan Feuerriegel, "Russian Propaganda on Social Media During the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine," *EPJ Data Science* 12, no. 35 (September 12, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1140/epids/s13688-023-00414-5>.

¹⁷⁶ Philip N. Howard, Bharath Ganesh, Dimitra Liotsiou, John Kelly, and Camille François, "The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018" (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2018), <https://demtech.oi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/12/The-IRA-Social-Media-and-Political-Polarization.pdf>; Gregory Eady, Tom Paskhalis, Jan Zilinsky, Richard Bonneau, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua A. Tucker, "Exposure to the Russian Internet Research Agency foreign influence campaign on Twitter in the 2016 US election and its relationship to attitudes and voting behavior," *Nature Communications* 14, no. 62 (2023), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-35576-9>; Tricia Jenkins, "What Did Russian Trolls Want During the 2016 Election? A Closer Look at the Internet Research Agency's Active Measures," *War on the Rocks*, May 22, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/what-did-russian-trolls-want-during-the-2016-election-a-closer-look-at-the-internet-research-agencys-active-measures/>.

¹⁷⁷ Mair et al., "Understanding Our Political Nature."

¹⁷⁸ Craig Silverman and Jeff Kao, "Infamous Russian Troll Farm Appears to Be Source of Anti-Ukraine Propaganda," *ProPublica*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.propublica.org/article/infamous-russian-troll-farm-appears-to-be-source-of-anti-ukraine-propaganda>.

¹⁷⁹ Cristina M. Arribas, Rubén Arcos, Manuel Gértrudix, Kamil Mikulski, Pablo Hernández-Escayola, Mihaela Teodor, Elena Novăcescu, Ileana Surdu, Valentin Stoian, and Antonio García-Jiménez, "Information Manipulation and Historical Revisionism: Russian Disinformation and Foreign Interference Through Manipulated History-Based Narratives," *Open Research Europe* 3, article 121 (July 27, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.16087.1>; "Nothing but the Truth: 10 War Documentaries," *n-ost*, April 18, 2024, <https://n-ost.org/article/nothing-but-the-truth-10-war-documentaries>.

Russian historical narratives¹⁸⁰. Meanwhile, falsified historical maps circulating on social media 'demonstrate' territorial claims, exemplified by China's 2023 official map controversy that depicted disputed territories as Chinese sovereign land, prompting international rejection and illustrating how cartographic propaganda reinforces contested sovereignty assertions¹⁸¹. False influencers present themselves as independent cultural bloggers from various countries but are actually centrally coordinated, promoting selective cultural content that aligns with geopolitical agendas. For instance, 'travel bloggers' showcase sanitised versions of Uyghur culture in Xinjiang, whilst carefully omitting any authentic expressions of cultural resistance or preservation efforts¹⁸².

Analysis of digital artistic activism reveals how digital technology has revolutionised activism by democratising and facilitating the global circulation of art, bypassing conventional channels such as institutional media or art exhibitions. This form of cultural activism enables direct transmission of values and traditions to international audiences, allowing marginalised communities to share their cultural practices, traditional crafts, indigenous languages, and resistance art without institutional gatekeeping. Digital platforms have become spaces where cultural preservation meets political activism, transforming national symbols into contemporary resistance imagery and traditional art forms into vehicles for dissent¹⁸³, functioning as a form of "bottom-up" cultural diplomacy that bypasses traditional governmental intermediaries.

This democratised cultural influence manifests particularly powerfully through organised fan communities that mobilise beyond entertainment purposes: BTS fans coordinated massive fundraising campaigns, raising over \$1 million for Black Lives Matter within 24 hours to match their idols' donation¹⁸⁴ or a coalition of K-pop fans and TikTok users successfully disrupted Donald Trump's

¹⁸⁰ Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, "European Cultural Heritage Days: Russia's Cultural War Against Ukraine," European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing, PE 733.650 (September 2022), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733650/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733650_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733650/EPRS_BRI(2022)733650_EN.pdf); Dennis Soltys, "Russian False Narratives About Ukraine in the West," Australian Institute of International Affairs, May 30, 2024, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/russian-false-narratives-about-ukraine-in-the-west/>.

¹⁸¹ "China's new national map has set off a wave of protests. Why?" AP News, September 1, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/china-map-territorial-dispute-south-sea-702c45165d7f9cade796700ffa5691e>; "Maps as Weapons: Legal Implications of Territorial Claims," Oxford Political Review, March 30, 2024, <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2024/03/30/maps-as-weapons-legal-implications-of-territorial-claims/>.

¹⁸² Bahram Sintash and Nuriman Abdureshid, "China enlists foreign vloggers to whitewash Uyghur situation in Xinjiang," Radio Free Asia, May 1, 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/foreign-propaganda-05012022132531.html>; Isobel Cockerell, "Welcome to TikTok's sanitized version of Xinjiang," Coda Story, September 11, 2020, <https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/tiktok-xinjiang-sanitized-version/>.

¹⁸³ Parmar documents how Indian digital activists transformed the saffron stripe of the national flag into protest imagery on Instagram, creating viral resistance art that bypassed official channels to reach global audiences. Bhawna Parmar, "Dissent Art in the Digital Age: Insights into the Culture of Activism on Instagram in India," South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal 32 (2024), <https://journals.openedition.org/samai/9318>.

¹⁸⁴ "BTS Black Lives Matter: Fans match band's \$1m donation," BBC, June 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52960617>.

Tulsa rally by flooding registration with fake tickets, leaving thousands of empty seats and undermining the event's intended impact¹⁸⁵.

The implications are profound: we now inhabit a world where cultural power operates simultaneously as liberation and manipulation, where the same technologies that democratise expression also enable sophisticated forms of control.

Crisis & conflict

This chapter reveals how nations and organisations deployed cultural strategies to address overlapping crises - from pandemics to conflicts, environmental disasters to democratic backsliding - creating new frameworks that emphasise resilience, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibility.

Cultural diplomacy has transformed from a supplementary diplomatic tool to an essential crisis response mechanism, with the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzing innovations that now define international cultural cooperation. UNESCO research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic compressed "5 years of progress into 3 months" in digital cultural transformation. Grincheva's (2022) study on "Cultural Diplomacy under Digital Lockdown" demonstrates that 95% of museums closed in May 2020, forcing immediate digitisation and creating "new virtual avenues for national cultural projection"¹⁸⁶. Mid-pandemic recovery strategies reveal sophisticated integration of digital and physical approaches. The EU's recovery guidelines (June 2021) coordinated safe resumption across member states while emphasizing digital platform development¹⁸⁷. African nations exemplified this rapid adaptation, with diplomatic practices shifting from South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's participation in virtual G20 meetings to continent-wide virtual conferences by East African Community and Economic Community of West African States leaders, culminating in Africa Day being held virtually on 25 May 2020 - demonstrating how the continent "leapfrogged into the era of virtual diplomacy" within months of the pandemic's onset¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁵ "Trump 'played' by K-pop fans and TikTok users who disrupted Tulsa rally," Guardian, June 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/21/trump-tulsa-rally-scheme-k-pop-fans-tiktok-users>.

¹⁸⁶ Natalia Grincheva, "Cultural Diplomacy under the 'Digital Lockdown': Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities in Museum Diplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18, no. 1 (2022): 8-11, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00237-z>.

¹⁸⁷ Coronavirus response," European Commission, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/resources/coronavirus-response>.

¹⁸⁸ Bob Wekesa, "COVID-19 Heralds the Era of Digital Diplomacy in Africa," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, June 11, 2020, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/covid-19-heralds-era-digital-diplomacy-africa>.

Concurrently, cultural heritage protection evolved from reactive preservation to proactive crisis response, establishing new frameworks that integrate cultural rights as fundamental humanitarian concerns.

UNESCO's expanded Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF) demonstrates the integration of cultural rights into crisis response. When the devastating earthquakes took place in Turkey and Syria in February 2023, UNESCO declared that "cultural heritage is considered part of the emergency"¹⁸⁹, mobilising the HEF to protect major affected historic sites, including the 2nd-century AD Gaziantep Castle, Aleppo Citadel, and Diyarbakır Fortress (a UNESCO site)¹⁹⁰, whilst United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) delivered 20 containers to archaeology museums in Hatay and Kahramanmaraş for safeguarding artefacts¹⁹¹.

The UNESCO Civil-Military Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Property is a pioneering initiative dedicated to enhancing respect for and protection of movable and immovable cultural property, promoting effective cooperation between civil and military stakeholders during peacetime, armed conflict, occupation, and post-conflict recovery. The Alliance was launched in May 2024 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Through this alliance, UNESCO seeks to operationalise the Hague Convention and its protocols more effectively by developing a regionally diversified network of military and civilian experts who contribute to capacity-building activities, training courses, and research on specific topics related to cultural heritage protection¹⁹².

The Ukraine crisis response (2022-2023) exemplifies this evolution, with 8 funded activities spanning immovable heritage, movable heritage, living heritage and artistic expression, including Blue Shield protection for 54 sites in Odessa and protective measures for seven public monuments.

¹⁸⁹ Sergio Cantone, "How can cultural sites be saved after the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes?" *Euronews*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/02/21/how-can-cultural-sites-be-saved-after-the-turkiye-syria-earthquakes>; "Castles, fortresses crumpled in Turkey and Syria quakes. What's next?" *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/23/unesco-heritage-damaged-turkey-earthquakes/>.

¹⁹⁰ "Earthquake in Turkey Damages Cultural Heritage Sites," *Art & Object*, <https://www.artandobject.com/news/earthquake-turkey-damages-cultural-heritage-sites>; "Earthquakes batter Turkey, Syria's historical monuments," *Al Jazeera*, February 13, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/7/earthquakes-damage-turkey-syrias-historic-mosques-and-castles>.

¹⁹¹ "Protecting cultural heritage after the earthquakes in Türkiye," United Nations Development Programme, April 11, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/turkiye/press-releases/protecting-cultural-heritage-after-earthquakes-turkiye>.

¹⁹² UNESCO, "UNESCO Civil-Military Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Property," <https://www.unesco.org/en/civil-military-alliance-protection-cultural-property>.

SUCHO¹⁹³ is an initiative comprising over 1,500 international volunteers collaborating online to digitise and preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage. Since the beginning of the invasion, SUCHO has web-archived over 5,000 websites and 50TB of data from Ukrainian cultural institutions to prevent these sites from going offline. The websites range from national archives to local museums, from 3D church tours to children's art centres. The organisation has donated digitisation equipment to over 70 cultural heritage institutions and is currently raising funds for additional kits. These crisis experiences have led to strategic European-level initiatives that seek to position culture as a priority on the international political agenda.

The systematic approach to cultural heritage protection in crisis situations has been further conceptualised through initiatives like the Alliance for Research on Cultural Heritage in Europe (ARCHE), which positions cultural heritage as both a vulnerable asset and an active instrument of societal resilience. ARCHE's Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda emphasises that cultural heritage serves as a catalyst for community resilience, particularly when addressing compound crises where climate change, geopolitical tensions, and social challenges intersect¹⁹⁴.

Beyond conflict zones, this rights-based approach extends to disaster response, as demonstrated by the LiBeirut Initiative, launched in August 2020 following Beirut's port explosion, which mobilised international support for cultural reconstruction as integral to community recovery, recognising the reconstruction of educational and cultural sectors as essential to post-disaster healing¹⁹⁵. International cooperation for cultural heritage emergency response demonstrates systematic diplomatic collaboration across multiple crises. ICCROM's FAR programme maintains a ready-to-deploy network of over 1,000 cultural first aiders in 122 countries, providing technical assistance during major emergencies since 2010. Recent examples include Sudan's 2023 heritage emergency training, which brought together more than 20 multidisciplinary heritage professionals in collaboration with UNESCO and the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation to develop crisis response capacities; Ukraine's ongoing cultural protection efforts (2022-2025) involving partnerships with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, Maidan Museum, and UNESCO; and Pakistan's post-flood heritage assessment training (2022) for multiple government agencies and universities¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹³ SUCHO Team, "Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online," <https://www.sucho.org/>.

¹⁹⁴ ARCHE Consortium, *ARCHE SRIA and its Synthesis* (Alliance for Research on Cultural Heritage in Europe, 2025).

¹⁹⁵ "UNESCO supports culture in emergencies through the Heritage Emergency Fund," UNESCO, September 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-supports-culture-emergencies-through-heritage-emergency-fund>.

¹⁹⁶ "Emergency response," International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), <https://www.iccrom.org/what-we-do/programmes/first-aid-and-resilience-cultural-heritage-times-crisis-far/emergency>.

These crisis experiences reveal that cultural heritage protection functions as more than preservation—it becomes a cornerstone of democratic resilience. When authoritarian regimes systematically target cultural sites, libraries, and artistic expressions, they attack the foundations of collective memory and identity that sustain democratic societies. The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage in conflicts represents an assault on the pluralistic values and historical narratives essential for democratic discourse, transforming heritage protection into a strategic imperative for defending democratic institutions and social cohesion.

The UN Security Council recognises that "African solutions to African problems" are grounded in rich cultural traditions of conflict resolution and mediation rooted locally, whilst African Union initiatives such as "Silencing the Guns" integrate cultural values of unity and solidarity into contemporary security strategies, demonstrating that African cultural identity functions as a fundamental instrument for consolidating regional peace and addressing global security and development challenges¹⁹⁷. African Union initiatives reveal sophisticated understanding of culture as both crisis target and response tool. The Continental AI Strategy (July 2024)¹⁹⁸ and Climate, Peace and Security Common Position (draft 2024)¹⁹⁹ position culture as "threat multiplier" mitigation, integrating traditional knowledge into contemporary crisis management frameworks.

This recognition of culture's role in democratic resilience has led to a fundamental reconceptualisation: culture is no longer viewed merely as a diplomatic asset or crisis victim, but as an active instrument of security. Contemporary security strategies increasingly acknowledge that cultural participation directly enhances democratic preparedness, social resilience, and collective capacity to resist both internal polarisation and external manipulation.

Culture as a sustained enhancer of security

"Is cultural diplomacy... an instrument designed to engage 'today's and tomorrow's leaders in discussing and developing approaches, mechanisms and actions that use culture as a cornerstone

¹⁹⁷ "Security Council Calls for Strengthening Africa's Role in Addressing Global Security, Development Challenges, Adopting Presidential Statement ahead of Day-long Debate," United Nations Security Council, May 15, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15706.doc.htm>.

¹⁹⁸ Continental AI Strategy: African Union, "Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy," July 2024, <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44004-doc-EN- Continental AI Strategy July 2024.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹ Climate Position (draft): African Union Commission, "AU Member States Consultation on Common African Position on Climate Change, Peace and Security Concludes, Fostering Greater Collaboration," August 29, 2024, last updated on September 2, 2024, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/au-member-states-consultation-on-common-african-position-on-climate-change-peace-and-security-concludes-fostering-greater-collaboration>.

in effectively addressing and anticipating national, international and human security concerns"? Culture as/for security? Interesting"²⁰⁰. This conceptualisation of culture as an enhancer of security takes on concrete dimensions in the context of contemporary crises, where cultural heritage becomes both target and instrument of resistance.

Contemporary security strategies increasingly recognise culture as a fundamental pillar of societal resilience and democratic preparedness. Finland's comprehensive security model explicitly acknowledges that maintaining cultural services and protecting cultural heritage form essential components of psychological resilience, whilst Ukraine's Internal Resilience Plan identifies cultural sovereignty as a key strategic priority²⁰¹. This paradigm shift reflects a growing understanding that cultural participation directly enhances democratic engagement and social cohesion, creating more robust societies capable of withstanding both internal pressures and external threats²⁰². When citizens actively engage with cultural activities, they develop stronger senses of belonging, empathy, and trust—particularly towards people from diverse backgrounds—thereby strengthening the social fabric that underpins democratic institutions.

This understanding of culture's role in democratic resilience must acknowledge that contemporary political behaviour operates increasingly through values-based rather than purely economic frameworks, with cultural issues like identity, heritage, and multiculturalism driving political polarisation more powerfully than traditional economic concerns. Effective cultural diplomacy therefore requires sophisticated engagement with the full spectrum of values present within and between societies, moving beyond technical expertise to develop what scholars term "emotional literacy"—the capacity to understand and respond to the affective dimensions of cultural and political life. Successful cultural diplomacy initiatives demonstrate the importance of disentangling factual claims from underlying value commitments in public debates, creating space for informed decision-making while respecting legitimate cultural differences. This approach proves particularly crucial when cultural diplomacy confronts authoritarian narratives that deliberately conflate cultural

²⁰⁰ Brandon Woolf, "Questioning Cultural Diplomacy," *The Arts Politic*, Issue 2: Bias, Spring 2010, 28-30.

²⁰¹ Security Committee, "Security Strategy for Society: Government Resolution," Publications of the Finnish Government 2025:3 (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2025), 142; Office of the President of Ukraine, "Volodymyr Zelenskyy Presented Ukraine's Internal Resilience Plan," November 19, 2024, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volodimir-zelenskij-predstaviv-plan-vnutrishnovi-stijkosti-u-94505>.

²⁰² European Commission, "Culture and Democracy, the Evidence: How Citizens' Participation in Cultural Activities Enhances Civic Engagement, Democracy and Social Cohesion," Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/07370fba-110d-11ee-b12e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

preservation with political authoritarianism, requiring democratic responses that validate cultural concerns while maintaining democratic principles²⁰³.

The promotion of European cultural content has emerged as a strategic defence mechanism against disinformation, hybrid threats, and psychological warfare orchestrated by authoritarian regimes. Whilst the EU allocated €335 million to Creative Europe in 2024, Russia invested over €1 billion in propaganda through culture and media during the same period, highlighting the weaponisation of cultural influence by hostile actors. This disparity underscores the critical need for robust investment in independent cultural content rooted in democratic values and developed through cross-border European cooperation. Romania's experience during the 2024 presidential elections demonstrated how gaps in digital cultural infrastructure can be rapidly exploited through disinformation campaigns, emphasising that cultural content creation is no longer merely about artistic expression but has become a matter of democratic security²⁰⁴. Cultural institutions serve as trusted community hubs during emergencies, providing essential infrastructure for social cohesion and collective response mechanisms²⁰⁵.

Regarding security, culture is considered crucial for Europe's overall resilience and a potent diplomacy tool, encompassing both hard and soft power. The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage in conflicts, such as in Ukraine, is identified as an attack on identity and shared histories, demonstrating culture's profound significance in wartime. Through soft power, including cultural diplomacy and exchanges, Europe can enhance its international influence and fortify its security strategies. Culture also plays a key role in emergency preparedness, strengthening Europe's ability to respond to crises by mobilising communities and providing essential infrastructure, with cultural centres often serving as trusted hubs during emergencies. Consequently, the EU is urged to strengthen international cultural relations, build lasting global connections, and combat the weaponisation of culture by authoritarian regimes, for instance, by leveraging educational exchange programmes like Erasmus. This holistic approach positions culture as a necessity for a strong, secure, and democratic Europe²⁰⁶.

This dual function - as sources of creative expression and as civic anchoring points - positions cultural institutions as critical assets in comprehensive security planning. Moreover, the cross-sectoral collaboration fostered through cultural programmes creates networks that prove invaluable during

²⁰³ Mair et al., "Understanding Our Political Nature."

²⁰⁴ Lars Ebert, "Letter to European Commission Leadership," Culture Action Europe, March 10, 2025, Brussels.

²⁰⁵ Security Committee, "Security Strategy for Society," 142.

²⁰⁶ Cultural Deal for Europe, *Cultural Deal for Europe: Annual Policy Conversation 2025*, "Culture: The Compass for Europe's Future," Report and Policy Messages (Brussels: Centre for Fine Arts Brussels – Bozar, 4 February 2025).

crisis situations, enabling rapid mobilisation of resources and coordinated community responses whilst maintaining democratic values and social solidarity.

When nature becomes culture

As cultural diplomacy expands its scope beyond traditional boundaries, the convergence of natural and cultural heritage represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary practice. This integration reflects a fundamental shift towards recognising the interconnectedness of ecological and cultural sustainability. Natural heritage increasingly functions as a central element of cultural diplomacy, representing not only ecosystems and landscapes of exceptional ecological value, but also repositories of cultural and spiritual identities that transcend national borders.

This convergence is exemplified by the fact that World Heritage natural sites cover approximately 3.5 million km² across over 100 countries and support livelihoods for millions of people²⁰⁷, including the Danube Delta which entered UNESCO's World Heritage in 1991 as a Biosphere Reserve and is considered one of the largest and best-preserved deltas on Earth.

The significance of Indigenous approaches to natural heritage extends far beyond their cultural value. Despite comprising less than five percent of the world's population, the estimated 476 million Indigenous people across more than 90 countries serve as stewards of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems²⁰⁸. Paradoxically, while representing 15 percent of the world's poorest populations, Indigenous communities have consistently demonstrated leadership in environmental protection, suggesting that their cultural frameworks offer viable alternatives to development models that prioritise short-term economic gains over long-term ecological sustainability.

The convergence of natural and cultural heritage finds practical expression in initiatives that bridge environmental conservation with cultural identity. Romania's Ivan Patzaichin - Mila 23 Association, established by the Olympic champion in the UNESCO-protected Danube Delta, demonstrates how individual leadership can catalyse integrated approaches that combine sport, climate protection, and heritage valorisation, creating models for sustainable development that honour both ecological and cultural values.

²⁰⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Natural World Heritage," <https://whc.unesco.org/en/natural-world-heritage/>.

²⁰⁸ United Nations Development Programme, "What do the Sustainable Development Goals have to do with Indigenous people?" UNDP Stories, August 8, 2023, <https://stories.undp.org/what-do-the-sustainable-development-goals-have-to-do-with-indigenous-people>.

The Danube Region spans 14 countries and 115 million people, transforming from a historically divided area into a unified cultural space through transnational cooperation. The ART NOUVEAU²⁰⁹ project exemplifies this transformation, bringing together 9 organisations across 7 countries to preserve and digitally conserve Art Nouveau architecture whilst promoting sustainable heritage management through coordinated local and international activities.

An interesting approach is also New Zealand's recent granting of "legal person" status to a mountain considered sacred by the Maori²¹⁰, reflecting a global trend of recognising that natural spaces are not just resources to be conserved, but territories loaded with deep cultural meanings that can serve as bridges for intercultural dialogue and soft power diplomacy instruments, through which nations promote their conservation values, respect for indigenous traditions and commitment to sustainability, transforming natural landscapes into true ambassadors of national identity and global environmental responsibility.

This extended temporal perspective finds powerful expression in Maori approaches to environmental stewardship. The Maori concept of *whakapapa* - the belief that all living beings and natural entities are interconnected through shared ancestry - creates a kinship responsibility that extends across generations, manifesting in law-making and community governance. Wakatu Incorporation²¹¹'s 500-year business plan, *Te Pae Tawhiti*, aligns commercial activities with intergenerational prosperity while conserving cultural resources inherited from ancestors, while Zealandia nature reserve operates under a 500-year vision to restore Wellington's ecosystems. These examples serve as "benchmarks for regenerative design" essential for leaving future generations an environment "in better condition than we found it"²¹².

Mainstreaming culture in global agendas

The #Culture2030Goal initiative is a global campaign coordinated by a coalition of international organisations (United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Culture Action Europe, International

²⁰⁹ "ART NOUVEAU: Sustainable protection and promotion of Art Nouveau heritage in the Danube Region," Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, <https://dtp.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/art-nouveau>.

²¹⁰ "A New Zealand mountain is granted personhood, recognising it as sacred for Maori," National Public Radio, January 31, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/31/nx-s1-5281937/new-zealand-mountain-personhood-maori>.

²¹¹ Maori-owned organisation with approximately 4,000 shareholders, descendants of the traditional Maori landowners from the Nelson, Tasman and Golden Bay regions. "Whanau Overview," Wakatu Incorporation, <https://www.wakatu.org/whanau-overview>.

²¹² Anne Pinto-Rodrigues, "Why Intergenerational Thinking Is Essential to Heal the Planet," YES! Magazine, April 4, 2023, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2023/04/04/climate-change-intergenerational-thinking>.

Music Council (IMC), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Council on Museums (ICOM), International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Arterial Network) that advocates for the inclusion of a specific target for culture in the UN's post-2030 sustainable development agenda. The initiative has its roots in the #culture2015goal movement (2013-2015), which advocated for the inclusion of culture in the current 2030 Agenda and produced four key documents, including a cultural objective proposal, a declaration and indicators for measuring cultural aspects of SDGs. The current stage of the campaign is in a crucial phase of technical and political consolidation in view of UNESCO Mondiacult 2025 in Barcelona. A detailed report and mapping of cultural indicators from the 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) has been developed. The report, coordinated by John Crowley, director of the PHGD Group, former director of the Section for research, policies and forecasting in the UNESCO Sector for social and human sciences, proposes a revised version of the cultural objective with 10 specific targets covering cultural rights, diversity, heritage, creativity, cultural industries, mobility of cultural professionals, rights of indigenous peoples and integration of culture in environmental protection and sustainable urbanisation. The European Network on Cultural Management and Policy (ENCATC) has also established six Focus Groups aligned with Mondiacult 2025 priorities—covering Economy of Culture, Cultural Heritage and Crisis, Culture and Climate Action, Culture and Education, Digital Technologies and Culture, and Cultural Rights—which co-produce knowledge and concrete recommendations to feed into the Mondiacult Digital Library²¹³ and contribute to global cultural policy development ahead of the 2025 UNESCO World Conference in Barcelona²¹⁴.

These institutional efforts at the global level find practical expression in local implementation strategies. This European approach aligns with a broader global effort to integrate culture into the sustainable development agenda, a process that has evolved gradually through practical experiences at the local level. "Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Local Action"²¹⁵ is the practical guide published in 2018 by UCLG's Committee on Culture, which provides concrete guidance for local governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders on how to integrate culture into achieving the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level,

²¹³ "UNESCO is establishing a digital library of diverse contributions on cultural policies and the impact of culture in all its dimensions, including the eight main themes of the upcoming MONDIACULT 2025 Conference. The digital library compiles a variety of knowledge products and expressions, alongside other relevant content". UNESCO, "Mondiacult Digital Library," <https://www.unesco.org/en/mondiacult/digital-library>.

²¹⁴ ENCATC, "Discover the Mondiacult 2025 Focus Groups," June 2, 2025, <https://www.encatc.org/en/news/detail/discover-the-mondiacult-2025-focus-groups/>.

²¹⁵ Agenda 21 for Culture, "Culture in the SDGs," <https://www.agenda21culture.net/advocacy/culture-in-SDGs>.

structured around each individual goal with practical examples of projects and policies implemented by cities worldwide.

The "Cultural Deal for Europe" (#CulturalDealEU) initiative²¹⁶ represents a strategic alliance formed by European cultural and creative sectors, cultural heritage and European philanthropy, which aims to raise culture to the level of strategic priority in the EU agenda for the period 2024-2029 and beyond. This coalition, led by Culture Action Europe, Europa Nostra and European Cultural Foundation, proposes that Europe respond to current challenges - war, division, inequality and polarization - by leveraging the power of culture and cultural heritage to build a united, resilient and democratic Europe. The main objectives of the initiative include establishing culture and cultural heritage as a priority at the highest level of EU institutions and commitment to allocating 2% of the EU budget to culture and cultural heritage.

However, the ambitious scope of these initiatives reveals significant challenges in translating policy commitments into effective action. The Nordic Region is positioned to lead in clarifying culture's role within the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals²¹⁷. EU public policy expert Mafalda Damaso's study "The EU's Disjointed Engagement with the Cultural Sustainability Agenda: Rhetoric versus Action" demonstrates that the EU fails to coherently align its cultural, media, and international cultural relations policies with the Sustainable Development Goals' ethos and dimensions. Despite officially supporting a cultural target in the post-2030 agenda, the EU's practical implementation remains unbalanced across policy domains, often prioritising economic objectives over holistic cultural sustainability. Her analysis of EU-South Africa cinema industry relations exemplifies how structural power imbalances risk remaining unaddressed in international cultural cooperation without active policies guided by a holistic framework²¹⁸.

Beyond policy alignment challenges, the integration of culture into climate action represents another frontier for sustainable development frameworks. The Global Call to Put Cultural Heritage, Arts and Creative Sectors at the Heart of Climate Action is a global campaign coordinated by the Climate Heritage Network²¹⁹, supported by ALIPH (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas). Launched during the European Cultural Heritage Summit in Venice in September

²¹⁶ Culture Action Europe, Europa Nostra, and European Cultural Foundation, "A Cultural Deal for a Democratic, United and Resilient Europe: 2024-2029-beyond," 2024, www.culturaldeal.eu.

²¹⁷ Nordic Culture Fund, "Nordic Culture Fund Strategy 2019-2025," expanded and revised 2021.

²¹⁸ Mafalda Damaso, "The EU's Disjointed Engagement with the Cultural Sustainability Agenda: Rhetoric versus Action," in *The European Union as a Global Cultural Power*, ed. Mafalda Damaso (Berlin: De Gruyter Brill, 2025), 95-115.

²¹⁹ Climate Heritage Network, "Global Call to Put Cultural Heritage, Arts and Creative Sectors at the Heart of Climate Action," <https://www.climateheritage.org/global-call>.

2023, the initiative seeks to integrate culture into international climate policy through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A major breakthrough came at COP28 with the inclusion of cultural heritage as one of seven thematic targets of the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework, creating the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UFGCR) which for the first time includes protection of heritage sites and cultural practices as official climate policy. The Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance (HACA)²²⁰, a joint project of Preserving Legacies and the Climate Heritage Network, was launched to ensure robust engagement by culture advocates in implementing this framework. Building on this momentum, the "We Make Tomorrow" campaign²²¹ unites heritage, arts, and creative voices globally through the refreshed Global Call targeting 20,000 signatures by COP30 and evidence-building for culture-led climate solutions.

These global climate initiatives demonstrate how culture can be mainstreamed across international frameworks, as evidenced in regional diplomatic partnerships. The EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, elevated in December 2020, demonstrates comprehensive cultural diplomacy through its socio-cultural cooperation pillar, which encompasses higher education exchanges, sustainable development initiatives, and capacity-building programmes across diverse cultural contexts. This partnership between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) exemplifies how regional diplomatic frameworks integrate cultural elements - from educational collaboration to heritage protection - as fundamental components of international relations rather than supplementary activities. The EU's recognition of ASEAN centrality in its Indo-Pacific strategy reflects a diplomatic approach that values cultural understanding and relationship-building as essential to regional stability and prosperity²²².

Transectorial conceptual approaches

The integration of Indigenous philosophies into international frameworks represents perhaps one of the most interesting shifts in cultural diplomacy's evolution. South Africa's "Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu" White Paper (2011)²²³ established the precedent, embedding four core

²²⁰ HACA is a volunteer community of practice focused on integrating cultural heritage into climate adaptation policies and actions. Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance, "Preserving Legacies Launches Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance," May 30, 2025, <https://www.heritageadapts.org/post/preserving-legacies-launches-heritage-adapts-to-climate-alliance>.

²²¹ "We Make Tomorrow," <https://wemaketomorrow.global/>.

²²² "The EU and ASEAN," Delegation of the European Union to ASEAN, <https://euinasean.eu/the-eu-asean>.

²²³ Government of South Africa, "White Paper on South African Foreign Policy: Building a Better World - The Diplomacy of Ubuntu," <https://www.gov.za/documents/white-papers/white-paper-south-african-foreign-policy-building-better-world-diplomacy>.

Ubuntu values—humanness, collective responsibility, restorative justice, and shared prosperity—into foreign policy architecture. The philosophy's practical impact appears in successful mediation efforts across African conflicts, where Ubuntu-based approaches prioritise restoration over punishment. Rwanda's Community-Based Social Healing model exemplifies Ubuntu-driven restoration, focusing on collective healing and reintegration rather than punitive measures, bringing together genocide survivors and perpetrators in therapeutic groups that emphasise mutual caring, dignity, and community reconciliation²²⁴.

The Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA), launched December 2021, represents the first multilateral economic instrument dedicated to Indigenous trade. Led by Canada with Australia, New Zealand, and Chinese Taipei as partners, IPETCA explicitly incorporates provisions for "implementing and supporting Indigenous Peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions." The arrangement's Partnership Council, jointly led by Indigenous and government representatives, ensures authentic integration of cultural values into economic policy through cooperation activities that bridge traditional knowledge systems with contemporary trade practices. This model illustrates how cultural diplomacy principles can be embedded within broader economic frameworks, creating instruments that advance both material prosperity and cultural sovereignty simultaneously²²⁵.

New Zealand's integration of Maori worldviews into foreign policy under Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta (2020-2023) demonstrates the operationalisation of Indigenous cultural frameworks within mainstream diplomacy. Four core values - *manaakitanga* (hospitality), *whanaungatanga* (relationships), *mahi tahi* and *kotahitanga* (collective unity), and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) - now guide New Zealand's international engagement. The approach drew on significant cultural congruence amongst Polynesian cultures in Pacific relations and employed the *taniwha* (the Maori spiritual guardians of waterways) and dragon (symbol representing power and wisdom) framework to highlight cultural links between Maori and Chinese ontologies. Māori worldviews have been incorporated within New Zealand's free trade agreements for over twenty years, featuring in every agreement the country has negotiated with other nations²²⁶.

²²⁴ Stefan Jansen, Jean Bosco Niyonzima, Patricia Gerbarg, Richard P. Brown, Alice Nsengiyumva, Japhet Niyonsenga, and Epaphrodite Nsabimana, "Evaluating effects of community-based social healing model on Ubuntu, mental health and psychosocial functioning in post-genocide Rwanda: protocol for cluster randomized control trial," *Trials* 25, no. 773 (November 16, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-024-08632-6>.

²²⁵ Government of Canada. "Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA) - Overview." Last modified July 2019. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/indigenous_peoples-peuples_autochtones/ipetca_overview-acecpa_apercu.aspx?lang=eng.

²²⁶ Bonnie Holster and Nicholas Ross Smith, "New Zealand's new approach to China and the Pacific," Chatham House, September 7, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/09/new-zealands-new-approach-china-and-pacific>.

The integration of intergenerational responsibility into contemporary policy frameworks exemplifies the operationalisation of indigenous governance principles within mainstream diplomatic practice. Seven Generation Leadership, formally recognised in international frameworks, embodies the principle of considering the impact of decisions on the next seven generations, as implemented through Canada's Environmental Protection Act framework²²⁷ and incorporated into the Assembly of First Nations' Seven Generations Continuum of Care Resolution²²⁸. Furthermore, while international development frameworks do not explicitly reference Seven Generations thinking, the principles of intergenerational responsibility are embedded within contemporary sustainable development practice. The United Nations Development Programme's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals inherently reflects this temporal perspective through climate action (Goal 13), sustainable consumption patterns (Goal 12), and ecosystem protection (Goals 14 & 15), demonstrating how indigenous wisdom regarding long-term planning increasingly influences global development approaches, even when not formally acknowledged²²⁹.

This indigenous approach extends beyond environmental policy to encompass comprehensive governance models, as demonstrated by Ecuador's Buen Vivir (*sumak kawsay*) constitutional framework²³⁰ and Bolivia's Rights of Nature legislation²³¹, which embed intergenerational responsibility principles into national legal systems.

These constitutional innovations illustrate how traditional ecological knowledge can reshape fundamental legal concepts, transforming nature from property to rights-bearing entity deserving protection across generations. This institutional adoption demonstrates the growing recognition that indigenous temporal frameworks offer viable alternatives to short-term political cycles, providing essential guidance for addressing global challenges that transcend conventional planning horizons. As these examples demonstrate, the integration of indigenous philosophies into mainstream diplomatic frameworks represents more than policy innovation—it signals a fundamental shift toward collaborative, long-term approaches essential for navigating an interconnected world.

²²⁷ Government of Canada, "Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (CEPA 1999)," Environment and Climate Change Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/canadian-environmental-protection-act-registry.html>.

²²⁸ Assembly of First Nations, "Developing a Seven Generations Continuum of Care for First Nations by First Nations of Health, Economic and Social Services," Resolution 19/2019, <https://afn.bynder.com/m/68017ac6c6bc4e1e/original/19-2019-Developing-a-Seven-Generations-Continuum-of-Care-for-First-Nations-by-First-Nations-of-Health-Economic-and-Social-Services.pdf>.

²²⁹ UNDP, "What do the Sustainable Development Goals."

²³⁰ Constitution of Ecuador 2008, arts. 10, 71-74, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ecuador_2008

²³¹ Bolivia Constitution 2009, art. 33; Law of the Rights of Mother Earth 2011, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia_2009.

As global crises increasingly overlap and intensify, cultural diplomacy's evolution from soft power instrument to hard necessity becomes irreversible. The frameworks, investments, and innovations documented here establish foundations for more resilient, inclusive, and effective international cooperation. Cultural diplomacy has proven its capacity not merely to respond to crises but to transform them into opportunities for deeper human connection and collaborative problem-solving—a capability increasingly essential for navigating an uncertain future.

Open end

Building upon these paradigmatic transformations in deinstitutionalisation and deterritorialisation, contemporary cultural diplomacy thus configures itself as an adaptive ecosystem that responds dynamically to emerging global challenges, from protecting heritage in conflict zones to integrating culture into the sustainable development agenda and recognising the spiritual values of natural spaces. The analysed experiences—from SUCHO's digital mobilisation to strategic initiatives such as the Cultural Deal for Europe and #Culture2030Goal, from climate ambassador programmes to local projects valorising natural-cultural heritage—demonstrate that the power of cultural diplomacy resides not only in its capacity to promote national identities, but in its ability to articulate collective responses to systemic crises that transcend traditional boundaries.

This analysis has traced the evolution of cultural diplomacy from state-centred soft power instrument to a complex, multi-actor ecosystem capable of responding dynamically to global challenges. The transformation through deinstitutionalisation and deterritorialisation has created new possibilities for international cooperation whilst simultaneously exposing cultural heritage to unprecedented digital vulnerabilities. The emergence of citizen diplomacy, heritage diplomacy, and the integration of Indigenous philosophies into international frameworks demonstrates cultural diplomacy's capacity to transcend traditional boundaries and address systemic crises.

As the examples of streaming diplomacy and narrative wars illustrate, cultural content has become a primary battlefield for influence, requiring sophisticated responses that combine technological innovation with democratic values. From protecting Ukrainian heritage through digital mobilisation to integrating climate action with cultural preservation, contemporary cultural diplomacy functions as both crisis response mechanism and resilience-building instrument. The mainstreaming of culture in global agendas—from the #Culture2030Goal to climate action frameworks—signals recognition that cultural diplomacy is no longer supplementary to international relations but fundamental to addressing interconnected global challenges.

This evolution marks a paradigm shift: from a cultural diplomacy centred on national representation towards one that functions as an instrument for building global resilience, in which cultural heritage becomes both the object and the means of an integrated diplomacy that connects security, sustainability and identity within a coherent framework for international action. The integration of Seven Generation thinking and Ubuntu philosophy into diplomatic practice points towards a future where cultural diplomacy serves not merely national interests but collective human flourishing.

As global crises increasingly overlap and intensify, cultural diplomacy's evolution²³² from soft power instrument to hard necessity becomes irreversible. The frameworks, investments, and innovations documented here establish foundations for more resilient, inclusive, and effective international cooperation. Cultural diplomacy has proven its capacity not merely to respond to crises but to transform them into opportunities for deeper human connection and collaborative problem-solving - a capability increasingly essential for navigating an uncertain future.

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²³² Parts of this research inform the author's forthcoming book *Fluid Cultural Geopolitics: Explorations of Cultural Diplomacy between Transnational Practices and Hybrid Spaces* (Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Institute Press, 2026)

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The impact of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture within the EU cultural policies: the cases of the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León (León, Spain) and the Neues Museum (Berlin, Germany)

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ABSTRACT

The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture (EUMies Awards) originated with the aim of creating a prestigious European recognition in the field of architecture. The choice of this topic is based on the crucial role of cultural policies and the singular aspect of the construction of museums, which contributes to cultural management for regenerative futures. Historical research with primary documents and photos sent by the archives of both institutions has been the main method used to examine the two case studies: the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León (MUSAC) in León (Spain) and the Neues Museum in Berlin (Germany). Understanding the relevance of both the common and divergent features of both cases will give a better understanding of the EUMies Awards and whether these buildings are aligned with the EU cultural policies.

Keywords:

European Union
Prize for
Contemporary
Architecture

Museums

Architecture,

EU cultural policy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Tomasz Pudłocki, Professor at College of Europe in Natolin, for his belief in this topic and for his careful reading of the manuscript. His mentorship has not only enriched the quality of this research but has also had a profound impact on my personal and intellectual growth. I am truly fortunate to have had the privilege of working under his guidance.

I am also grateful to my family, partner and friends for their support during my career transition. This work is a meaningful result of that journey.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León and the Neues Museum. Without their collaboration, this research would have been impossible.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the support received at Nebrija University. Being surrounded by passionate colleagues has inspired me to continue researching.

Finally, I am sincerely grateful for the time and effort invested by each reviewer in thoroughly assessing this paper.

The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award (EUMies Awards)

The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture / Mies van der Rohe Awards, also known as the EUMies Awards, started as a proposal of the Spanish Member of the European Parliament and Catalan philosopher Xavier Rubert de Ventós (1939-2023). On 28 April 1987, the Mies van der Rohe Foundation signed an agreement between the European Commissioner for the environment Carlo Ripa di Meana and the Barcelona Mayor Pasqual Maragall to create the 'Mies van der Rohe Award of the European Communities'. In 1988, one year after the reconstruction of the German Pavilion in Barcelona, this architectural competition began. As a distinguishing feature, the name of the awards has changed over the years. Firstly, the name was "Mies an der Rohe Award" from its creation in 1988 until 1998. In 1999, the renewed name "EUMies Awards" was introduced, and it is now the official name of the awards. Every two years, when the prize takes place, there is an award ceremony in May in the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion -formerly known as the German Pavilion- in Barcelona (Spain).

In 2000, the Mies van der Rohe Foundation sent a draft for the Mies van der Rohe Award with a proposal to create the 'Emerging Architect Special Mention' for young architects. One year later, in 2001, the foundation's proposal was accepted, and this award became the official prize for architecture of the European Union. Moreover, since 2001, the Mies van der Rohe Foundation officially co-organize the prize along with the European Commission.

The awards' objective is to recognize the contemporary architectural excellence of European projects, to underline the European cities as a role model to contribute to a sustainable European economy, to promote transnational architectural projects, to support architectures from the EU Member States and other countries that own an agreement with the EU, to develop business opportunities in the world market, and to emphasize the role of the European Union supporting the contemporary architecture²³³. Therefore, the EUMies Awards are not only aligned with the EU's cultural policies but also with other policies included in the competences of the European Union as a supranational organization.

The EUMies Awards are an example of their time for the architectural and cultural EU policies. Although the 1990s was a decade when the Eurocentric ideas were criticized and the EU started to implement a decentralizing agenda²³⁴, the creation of these kinds of prizes as part of the EU cultural

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ ONAR, N. F., and NICOLAÏDIS, K. (2013). "The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a Post-Colonial Power" *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2., 284.

policies, like the EUmies Awards, has been seen by some scholars as part of the reinforcement of the Eurocentrism to get a “conscious elevation of European aesthetics within the emerging neoliberal economy”²³⁵. On the other hand, these awards can also be a clear example of the new cultural policies developed and implemented by the European Commission after the signature of the Maastricht Treaty on 7 February 1992, which developed Culture as a competence of the European Union, through the recognition of the relevance of the European architects to build sustainable cities, towns and villages. From whatever point of view of the literature, these awards have a history, and they are well established²³⁶ within the Creative Europe program of the European Commission.

Case studies: projects awarded with the EUmies Award in 2007 and 2011

To gain an in-depth understanding of the EUmies, two different cases will be studied: the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León (MUSAC) and the Neues Museum, which were buildings that won the EUmies Award in 2007 and 2011 respectively. With the following analysis, and through original documents of both projects provided by both institutions, the peculiarities and differences between these two magnificent artistic institutions will be discussed. In museums, architecture is the necessary container to bring art closer to the citizens. At the same time, these museums represent how cultural policies can be realized at the national level and recognized at the European level. Hence, national policies and EU policies related to culture can be complementary and benefit from each other.

The Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León (MUSAC): Mansilla+Tuñón Architects, 2007

The Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León (MUSAC for its initials in Spanish) is in León (Spain). This town of 121.184 citizens²³⁷ is home to the largest and most important public museum of contemporary art in its region, *Castilla y León*. The building received the European Union Prize for

²³⁵ JARZOMBK, M. (2021). “Architecture in the 1990s, the Mies van der Rohe Award, and the creation of the civilization industrial complex” in *Rethinking Global Modernism*. London: Routledge.

²³⁶ MILJENKO, B., and PRPIC, L. (2014) “Made in Europe: 25 Years of the European Union Prize - Mies van der Rohe Award / Fundació Mies an der Rohe; European Commission (Creative Europe Program)” *14th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*.

²³⁷ Spanish National Institute of Statistics, *Official population data by municipality* (2023).

Contemporary Architecture (EUMies Awards) in 2007. The main objective of the museum is to be an archive of contemporaneity as well as to host a moving project with rotating exhibitions to showcase the latest developments in contemporary art. Its location and relevance as a cultural center for the whole region of *Castilla y León* make thousands of people visit this remarkable museum. Using the term remarkable I do not exaggerate, because it is more than just a building with a particular purpose to go on.



FIGURE 1. THE MAIN FAÇADE OF THE MUSAC BUILDING

Source: Jordi Bernadó

The MUSAC building was designed by two Spanish architects from Madrid: Emilio Tuñón (1958-) and Luis Moreno Mansilla (1959-2012). Before the EU prize, they got the Spanish Architecture Award in 2003. Both architects, also known as Mansilla+Tuñón, were hugely influenced by the American philosopher Richard Rorty, who states that “poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific, or political progress results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need”²³⁸. The concepts of “equity”, “diversity” and “democracy” have been part of its architecture since the beginning of its work together, and they are also present in the design of the MUSAC as the private obsession of the architects.

The architects’ interest in history also played an important role in creating the building. The first historical referent is the city of Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire (518 B.C.) founded by Darius the Great, that uses the repetition of elements and the change of scale depending on the uses. The second reference is the Diocletian’s palace in Split, Croatia (3rd- 4th C.E.), built as a single piece to

²³⁸ RORTY, R. (1989). “The Contingency of Selfhood” in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 37.

which a medieval city was superimposed. The third inspiration is the Indian city Fatehpur Sikri in the Agra district (1571-1581), built all at once with the same geometric logic and adapted to different interconnected programs. Finally, the last reference is the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto (Japan), the residential palace of Emperors since 1868. This magnificent palace was an architectonic inspiration thanks to the 'tatami', a geometrical and repetitive element that establishes connections between all parts of the design. Through these historical referents²³⁹, in a very flexible way, Mansilla+Tuñón designed the MUSAC building with contemporary and personal adjustments to allow it to respond to the necessities and realities of the architecture of the beginning of the 2000s.

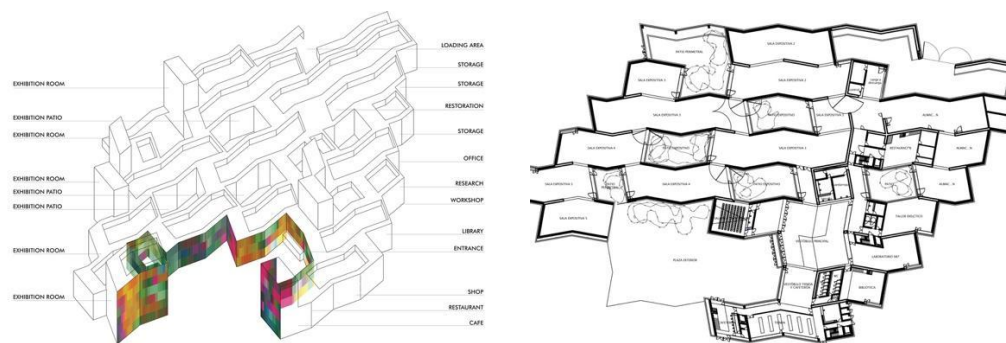


FIGURE 2. DESIGN OF THE MUSAC BUILDING

Source: MUSAC's archive

The geometry²⁴⁰ of the plan and the façade are, without any doubt, the main characteristics of the building. The simplicity of the pattern makes it even more singular. For Tuñón, one of the MUSAC architects, the architecture resorts to memory and history to analyze everything²⁴¹, and it can be made through geometry. The geometry of the MUSAC is also based on certain Roman pavements to create an uneven but stable surface. Moreover, the main façade is made of 3,351 stained glass which reinforces the geometric idea of the project.

²³⁹ GONZÁLEZ CRUZ, A. J., MARURI GONZÁLEZ DE MENDOZA, N., and LUPIÁÑEZ, R. P. (2020). "The hidden geometry of the MUSAC: Field systems as the origin of form in contemporary project," *Cuadernos de Proyectos Arquitectónicos*, no. 10, 67.

²⁴⁰ HERNÁN MARTÍN, S., and CORONA RUIZ, J. C. (2005). "The geometry of the space" *Cercha*, no. 82., 42.

²⁴¹ TUÑÓN, E. (2003). "The hidden geometry of the memory." *Circo*, no. 111, 7.



FIGURE 3. TOP OF THE BUILDING

Source: Jordi Bernadó



FIGURE 4. SIDE OF THE BUILDING

Source: Jordi Bernadó

The MUSAC building is on the outskirts of the town, in the suburbs created in the 1960s²⁴², during the Franco's dictatorship in Spain (1936-1975). It is also remarkable that MUSAC's EUMies Award came after its participation in the exhibition *On-Site: New Architecture in Spain* in the prestigious Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2006 and this project also represented Spain in the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2003. For all the reasons mentioned above, the MUSAC is one of the main architectural projects with more recognition of the 2000s in Spain. Considering the size of the town and knowing that the region is one of the most inhabited in Spain (25.3 inhabitants per km²)²⁴³, the construction of the MUSAC has been one of the most ambitious investments in museums in the 2000s in Spain. In a sense, the 2007 EUMies Awards have recognized the importance of creating cultural institutions of national reference in vulnerable areas.

The MUSAC is one of the most recently built contemporary art museums in Spain. The museum's communications department explains that the official inauguration of the MUSAC on 1 April 2005 had a great media impact, but at the same time states that it has published only five press releases from 2005 to 2009 expressly about the building²⁴⁴. Its press releases published on its website are usually about the exhibitions of the museum. Nevertheless, when MUSAC must express its identity, the communications department uses mostly its colourful and attractive façade. The way of

²⁴² BOX, Z. (2012). "The body of the nation: Architecture, town planning and the capital city in the early years of Franco's regime" *Journal of Political Studies* 1, no. 155: 151-181.

²⁴³ Directorate General of Budgets, European Funds and Statistics of the Junta de Castilla y León with data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics. *Official report of total and foreign population of Castilla y León* (2023).

²⁴⁴ ÁLVAREZ, P. (2009, May 29) "Departamento de Comunicación y Prensa de MUSAC, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León" *III Jornadas de Formación Museológica Comunicando el Museo*.

communicating with the public from León is different for the public knowledgeable about contemporary art, since for the people from León the focus is on emphasizing the modern aesthetic that is linked to León's tradition²⁴⁵. Perhaps, because only one person is working in the MUSAC communication department, the strategy about the importance of the building is not as thoroughly realized as it should be.

Around the date of the inauguration, 1 April 2005, it is true that the media coverage reached its peak. The main attraction for the general media was the inauguration by then-Prince and Princess of Spain. Some of the main Spanish newspapers (*El País* and *El Mundo*) wrote about this inauguration, as well as the local media (*El Diario de León*). In the international media, the news of the museum's opening appeared in a short article about travel advice in *The New York Times* on 29 May 2005²⁴⁶. For specialized media, the news of the Mies van der Rohe award in 2007 was the main media hook and was announced in local (*Diario de León*), national (*El Mundo*, *Arquitectura Viva*, *On Diseño*, *Masdearte*, *Croma Cultura*), and international general and specialized media (*DW*, *Dezeen*, *ArchDaily*).

After the opening and the EUMies recognition, the MUSAC news lost relevance at national and international levels. At the local level, there is more news, but usually related to the content of exhibitions. One of the most interesting articles is an interview with the former Director of the museum, who argued in 2009 that the audience for contemporary art has been "from not existing to existing" and believes that, in the following years it will be more evident, given the thousands of children who attend the workshops organized by the museum. Despite the loss of relevance, the museum was also featured in the *New York Times* on 19 May 2010, five years after its inauguration, and described as "one of the most astonishingly bold"²⁴⁷ museums that hit the Spanish cultural landscape. This newspaper article puts the MUSAC in León on par with emblematic contemporary buildings in Spain's largest cities, Madrid and Barcelona.

Neues Museum: David Chipperfield Architects and Julian Harrap, 2011.

The Neues Museum on Berlin's Museum Island was built between 1841 and 1859 according to the plans of the architect Friedrich August Stüler (1800-1865). During the Second World War, the building was severely damaged by bombs and some parts were even inevitably destroyed. For decades, the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ ABEND, L. (2005) "Advisory: Travel Notes; At a New Museum in Spain, a Contemporary Inspiration Drawn From Stained Glass" *The New York Times*.

²⁴⁷ FERREN, A. (2006, February 19). "In Eternal Spain, Architecture on the Edge," *The New York Times*.

unsecured war ruin was exposed to inclement weather and suffered further damage. In 1997, David Chipperfield Architects and Julian Harrap won the international competition for the reconstruction of the Neues Museum as a result of an evaluation procedure (1994-1997)²⁴⁸, that included the repair and restoration of the surviving parts of the building, as well as the recovery of the original sequence of rooms and the original volume with new parts that complement the former building.



FIGURES 5 AND 6: THE NEUES MUSEUM ON BERLIN'S MUSEUM ISLAND AFTER THE WORLD WAR II

All photos provided by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin's Zentralarchiv (Central Archive)

FIGURE 5. VIEW FROM THE ROOF OF THE ALTES MUSEUM, 1964 (LEFT)

Source: SMB

FIGURE 6. THE BURNT-OUT STAIRWELL AFTER THE BOMBS, 1943 (RIGHT)

Source: Rosa Mai (photographer)

²⁴⁸ Neues Museum, "Text credits: Neues Museum on Berlin's Museum Island" (2018), 1.



FIGURE 7. AERIAL VIEW OF THE MUSEUM ISLAND, 1985 (LEFT)

Source: SMB

FIGURE 8. DAMAGED WEST FAÇADE, 1985 (RIGHT)

Source: SMB

Just before the unification of Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) began its efforts to secure and restore its part of the German heritage, since it was considered as “vital to the region’s prosperity”²⁴⁹. After the reunification of the city government of Berlin in 1989, efforts from the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and the City’s Hall worked together to revise the plans to preserve the monuments of Berlin²⁵⁰.

²⁴⁹ JAMES, J. (2004). “Recovering the German Nation: Heritage Restoration and the Search for Unity” in *Marketing Heritage: Archeology and the Consumption of the Past*. Lanham: Altamira Press.

²⁵⁰ BARNDT, K. (2011) “Working through Ruins: Berlin’s Neues Museum” *The German Review*, no. 86.

The archaeological restoration was guided by the 1964 Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites²⁵¹. The starting point was the existing inventory in its different states of preservation. Following these guidelines, defects were repaired, although their surface and gloss remained behind the original to not compete with the aged original like a new copy of the old. The restoration and repair were guided by the idea of emphasizing what had been found as well as possible in its antique beauty and its location, but the new parts of the museum show what had been lost without imitating it. It is composed of quiet and prefabricated exhibition rooms constructed in a large format with a special concrete made of white cement and Saxon marble. Correspondingly, the three flights of stairs in the staircase hall, which was only preserved with bricks, were reconstructed. With the accomplishment of the re-construction of the largely preserved colonnade, the pre-war situation was hugely restored on the east side of the building²⁵². On the west part, the new building of the James-Simon-Galerie in front of the Neues Museum is a continuation of the urban planning before the western façade was removed in 1938.



FIGURES 9 AND 10. THE NEUES MUSEUM ON BERLIN'S MUSEUM ISLAND AFTER THE RESTORATION (2009)

All photos provided by the Neues Museum

FIGURE 9. EAST FAÇADE NEUES MUSEM (LEFT)

Source: Ute Zscharnt for David Chipperfield Architects

FIGURE 10. STAIRCASE HALL (RIGHT)

Source: Ute Zschant for David Chipperfield Architects

²⁵¹ ICOMOS, "International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites," Venice, Italy (1964).

²⁵² Neues Museum. Text credits: Neues Museum on Berlin's Museum Island (2018), 1.

The process to re-build the building of the Neues Museum began in 1998 and finished in 2009. It lasted more than ten years to make this challenging engineering project possible²⁵³. In 2009, the Neues Museum reopened its doors as the third refurbished building on Berlin's *Museuminsel* (Museum Island). After more than sixty years, the collections of the Egyptian Museum and the Museum of Pre- and Early History returned to the museum.



FIGURE 11. MODERN ROOM



FIGURE 12. APOLLO ROOM

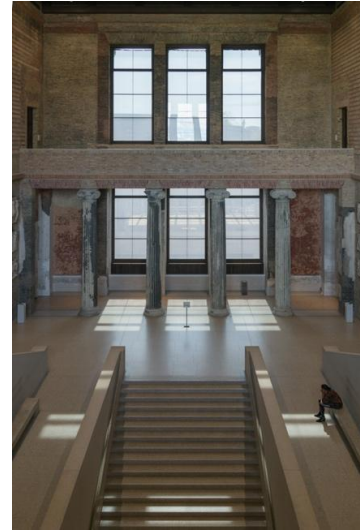


FIGURE 13. STAIRCASE HALL

Source: David Chipperfield

Source: Bartosz Haduch

Source: Bartosz Haduch

To understand the importance of the completion of this project, Werner Lorenz stated in 1999 that the Neues Museum “can be considered the most important (and most expensive) rebuilding project in Germany after the reunification”²⁵⁴, and Alan Balfour argued in 2009 that “Chipperfield’s renovation is superb, and its strength comes in part from the brilliant imaginations that preceded him

²⁵³ EISELE, G., and SELLER, J. (2012). “Reconstruction of the Neues Museum in Berlin, Germany” *Engineering History and Heritage*, no. 165.

²⁵⁴ LORENZ, W. (1999) “Classicism and High Technology – the Berlin Neues Museum,” *Construction History* 15.

contemplating the reality of Berlin”²⁵⁵. The conservation and restoration of historic buildings damaged during World War II is not a simple task, but it is relevant for future generations²⁵⁶.

In 2011, two years after the reconstruction of the building, the Neues Museum won the EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture, which appreciated the complexity of the historical restoration of this significant building in the Berlin’s Museum Island, one of the leading cultural areas in Europe.

In terms of the museum’s media relevance, it is important to point out that its opening made national (*DW, Spiegel, Meckur, Bild* and *Taz*) and international (*ABC News, The New York Times, The Guardian, CBS News, The San Diego Union-Tribune* and *The Independent*) headlines, specifically larger from the United States and the United Kingdom. The reopening of its emblematic collections also attracted specialized media (*Dezeen, Heritage Key, FAD Magazine* and *Baunetz Wissen*) and Berlin local newspapers (*Berliner Kurier, Berliner Morgenpost* and *Tagesspiegel*). It would be possible to argue that its media impact was great, also due to the reopening of its collections, and because it was a reconstruction of a building bombed during the Second World War. The reopening was relevant for the broad public, as well as for archaeologists and historians. After the opening the media coverage was diluted, although some other articles were published, such as on *Architectural Record*²⁵⁷ in 2010 and an entry in the *Britannica* encyclopedia in its online version.

The greatest media impact after the reopening was when it was awarded the EUMies Award in 2011. The most interested in the topic was the architecture-specialized media (*Architizer, ArchDaily, Building Design, Arkitektura, Canadian Architect, The Architect’s Journal, Artforum, Arquitectura Viva, DesignCurial* and *Architect*). Accordingly, German newspapers (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Tagesspiegel* and *Focus*) and other international newspapers (*ABC, The Guardian, The New York Times* and *El País*) published the news.

For the citizens of Berlin, the most important thing was the reopening of the museum, rather than the Mies van der Rohe award. Emotions are mainly linked to history in this case, and not so much in its exhibitions since there is a stable exhibition that always remains in place, which perhaps makes it lose dynamism and attractiveness for locals.

²⁵⁵ BALFOUR, A. (2009) “The Rebirth of the Neues Museum is the Latest Stage in the Architectural and Political Evolution of the Spreeinsel, Berlin’s Historic Museum Island,” *Architectural Review* 225, 88

²⁵⁶ DIETZL, K., and SCHÜRMANN, A. (2006) “Foundation Improvement of historic buildings by micro piles, Museum Island, Berlin and St. Kolumba, Cologne” *Proceedings on the 7th International Workshop on Micropiles*, Schrobhausen, 1

²⁵⁷ STEPHENS, S. (2010). “Neues Museum.” *Architectural Record*.

After the Mies van der Rohe Award, media attraction decreased considerably. In international newspapers, it disappeared almost completely. Some of the few mentions are linked to Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie* (New National Gallery), which was closed for renovation from 2015 to 2021. The New National Gallery is a modernist building designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1968 and renovated by David Chipperfield, the same architect who restored the Neues Museum. Apart from these few mentions, the news about the Neues Museum was diluted among all the cultural activity of Berlin.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the evolution of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture (EUMies Awards). EU cultural policy has played a meaningful role in shaping the criteria of the EUMies Awards since they promote architectural excellence and emphasize the EU's commitment to green policies, sustainability and innovation through the European Green Deal²⁵⁸. Both case studies, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Castilla y León (MUSAC) in Spain and the Neues Museum in Germany, awarded in 2007 and 2011 respectively, are based on architectural sustainability and innovation, without leaving aside history. Comparing both cases will let us understand the trends as well as the differences of the awarded projects.

History is a clear feature in MUSAC and Neues Museum buildings. In the first case, history has been influential for the design of the MUSAC building because it is based on different historical constructions, from the city of Persepolis, built in the 6th century B.C., to the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto, built in the 19th century. The new MUSAC building, while contemporary and innovative, draws on the knowledge and influence of twenty-five centuries of Asian and European architectural history. In the second case, the Neues Museum, history has been the starting point of the project. The Neues Museum was bombed during the Second World War, so it is a re-building project. At the same time, the Neues Museum's exhibitions are from Egyptian and Pre- and Early History. To sum up, in both cases history is the base of the design: MUSAC took advantage of knowledge from ancient architecture to create a new building, and the Neues Museum used its history to rebuild properly the damaged building. Given the differences between the MUSAC, a new building housing contemporary art, and the Neues Museum, a reconstructed building housing Egyptian and Prehistoric and Early historical art, freedom of artistic and architectural expression is more limited in the case of the Neues Museum, which respected the old debris to be able to reconstruct the missing part and not forget the

²⁵⁸ HAINSCH, K., LÖFFLER, K., BURANDT, T., AUER, H., CRESPO DEL GRANADO, P., PISCIELLA, P., and ZWICKL-BERNHARD, S. (2022) "Energy transition scenarios: What policies, societal attitudes, and technology developments will realize the EU Green Deal?" *Energy* 239.

past. On the contrary, the architects of MUSAC were able to use all their creativity and freedom to design a new building by receiving an empty lot.

In terms of location, both cases are completely different. On the one hand, MUSAC is located on the outskirts of León, a small city in the northwest of Spain, whose contemporary art exhibitions are aimed at connoisseurs of contemporary art, who come expressly to visit the museum. On the other hand, the Neues Museum is in the heart of Berlin's museums, on the Museum Island, and its exhibitions are aimed at a wide audience interested in history. The location is unbeatable, but due to the wide variety of museums on the island²⁵⁹, the Neues Museum is one of the most unknown despite having been recognized with the EUmies Award.

After comparing the two cases, it is possible to conclude that, despite the commonalities, winning projects can be highly distinctive and innovative in their respective domains. Moreover, considering all editions of the EUmies Awards, this prize is primarily aimed at experienced European architects, to promote the single market²⁶⁰. The pattern that can also be observed is that this prize, which implements EU cultural policies, coincides with the policies that are approved by EU institutions. As an example, the only woman who owns an EUmies Award, Zaha Hadid, was awarded in 2003, after the implementation of EU gender policies in the early 2000s. Moreover, the focus on sustainability in the awarded projects is explicit from the signature of the Paris Agreement²⁶¹ in April 2016 and the launch of the European Green Deal in December 2019.

Essentially, the EUmies Awards is only one of the many tools that the EU uses to promote the idea of 'European identity'. Architecture is utilized as a new expression of "post-national identity in general and in particular for the emergence of a 'spatial' European identity"²⁶². Through artistic and architectural awards, the EU tries to embody the historic consciousness and the cultural abundance of European countries. Perhaps the current EU cultural policy could be seen as a model for other regions aiming to integrate through cultural regionalism to build "economic ties and cultural

²⁵⁹ SCHIRRMEISTER, G. (2021). "Museum Island (Museumsinsel) Berlin" in *Natural Stone and World Heritage*. CRC Press: 7-14.

²⁶⁰ FLIGSTEIN, N. (2001). "Institutional Entrepreneurs and Cultural Frames - The Case of the European Union's Single Market Program," *European Societies* 3, no. 3: 261–87.

²⁶¹ WALLACE, C. Z. (2018). "Energy, Technology, and Culture: The Paris Agreement, Social Conflict, and Cultural Evolution." *Spectrum* 7, no. 1: 1-7.

²⁶² DELANTY, G., and JONES, R. P. (2002). "European identity and architecture" *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 4: 453-466.

identities”²⁶³. At the same time, cultural diplomacy is a long-term and powerful tool to foster the EU’s foreign policy²⁶⁴.

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²⁶³ VÄYRYNEN, R. (2003). “Regionalism: Old and New” *International Studies Review* 5, no. 1: 25–51.

²⁶⁴ RYNNING, S. (2003). “The European Union: Towards a Strategic Culture?” *Security Dialogue* 34, no. 4: 479-496.

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The significance of intrinsic concern for the 'institutional value' of cultural organizations. An investigation using the example of festivals in the arts focusing on international and non-western arts

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we address the importance of intrinsic concerns of publicly funded cultural organizations and their ability to create relational values. Using the example of festivals in the arts, we examine the institutional value they have acquired in international programming and their contribution to the literacy of global artistic expression. The emergence of festivals reveals that postcolonial discourse is important for such a cosmopolitan understanding of the arts and that cosmopolitanism itself deserves more attention with regards to the instrumental values of cultural policy. The article includes the findings of a survey of international festivals in Austria, demonstrating the limitations and the significance of cosmopolitanism as a relational value.

Keywords:

International
program strategies
Festivals in the arts
Intrinsic concerns
Relational values

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Emily Kirchlechner for her support with the survey.

Introduction

In the context of legitimization discourses, the focus of numerous research projects is on impact analyses, collaborative governance and political participation. They promote public awareness and support the strategic development of organizations and cultural policy (Holden, 2006; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Craig, 2007; Teissl et al., 2021; Teissl & Reid, 2025). In contrast, research on intrinsically motivated concerns and the resulting values is underrepresented in the discussion of the effects and values generated by cultural organizations (Mair, 2019). As “creators of value in their own right” (p. 18), cultural organizations develop “institutional value” by building relationships of trust with their audiences and stakeholders (Holden, 2006). Our thesis is that insights into intrinsically motivated concerns can contribute to a deeper understanding of their institutional value and foster their relationship with funding institutions.

For the theoretical framework, we rely on a model from environmental ethics and policy that establishes an integrative understanding of extrinsic and intrinsic concerns (Deplazes-Zemp, 2024). This provides a basis for relational values in the cooperation of different stakeholders (Deplazes-Zemp, 2024). Using the example of festivals in the arts, we investigate intrinsically motivated concerns to drive international program strategies and contribute to cosmopolitan worldviews. The literature review focuses on the genealogy of the institutional value of festivals in the internationalization of festival programs examining both optimism and ambivalence. We then present and discuss selected findings from a small survey of festivals in Austria done in June 2025. In doing so, we aim to contribute to strengthening the role of cultural organizations in society as well as the relationships between cultural policy and non-profit cultural organizations.

Theoretical framework: How to overcome tensions

Differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic levels of meaning adds analytical value. Rather than viewing intrinsic and extrinsic as opposites, Deplazes-Zemp (2024) demonstrates the potential for an integrative understanding. This, in turn, fosters positive relationships between stakeholders and facilitates the identification of commonalities. Intrinsic values as seen in environmental ethics and policy can be transferred to artworlds. These values are:

- a) value for its own sake, as an end in itself;
 - b) value supervening on internal properties; and
 - c) the value of the properties that make an entity morally valuable (Deplazes-Zemp, 2024: 169ff).
- Cultural organizations benefit from the multiple values of artistic goods by facilitating aesthetic experiences. Their interest in the qualities and abilities of the goods they make accessible coincides, to a certain extent, with instrumental value from a funding perspective, which considers offerings as a means to an end. Relational values avoid reductionism by orienting instrumental goals towards artistic goods themselves rather than circumstances outside the artistic field (Belfiore & Bennet,

2007). The identification of relational values as an intersection of cultural policy expectations and the mission of cultural providers is key for the productive organization of professional environments, for strengthening institutional values and the relationship between funders and grantees (Craik, 2007). We assume that cultural institutions develop expertise that is not always recognized in relational values. Such values require forms of exchange and collaboration in order to identify values and develop potential. In the relationship between public funding institutions and beneficiaries, instruments such as independent expert advisory boards and the political involvement of interest groups ensure that the views of beneficiaries are considered (Schad, 2019; Teissl & Reid, 2025). However, it cannot be ruled out that the interests of cultural policy and event organizers may evolve in a similar but not joint manner. The advantage of collaborative development lies in strengthening institutional value potential as well as gaining a better understanding of complementary relationships.

The festival's commitment to cosmopolitanism. Intrinsic concerns between optimism and ambivalence

Arts festivals have a field-configuring influence based on their specific concerns (Moeran & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2011), creating special institutional value (Holden, 2006). As well as providing a space for innovative forms of artistic expression - such as Wagner's complete opera in Bayreuth in the modern era (Teissl, 2013; Farnworth, 2020) - festivals also promote international program strategies. We interpret these concerns as interventions driven by the intention to impact the current perception of the arts and worldviews. From a diachronic perspective, the term 'international' reveals worldviews shaped by nation-state thinking, the overcoming of which is represented by cosmopolitanism. It also reveals worldviews shaped by colonial power imbalances and postcolonial criticism of these imbalances. We therefore support the assertion that the current discourse on a 'global turn' in artistic understanding does not render postcolonial theories obsolete (Cohen et al., 2023). Instead, European societies must address deeply rooted colonial narratives (Mbembe, 2014) and promote the decolonization of Eurocentric worldviews (Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2015; Purtschert, 2019). Drawing on aesthetics, the history of European arts festivals reveals new beginnings (Sassatelli, 2012), as well as the inherent tensions between international, postcolonial and cosmopolitan concepts (Papastergiadis, 2012; Sassatelli, 2012).

The emergence of the “international” as a challenging starting point

In the 19th century, when the first modern festivals emerged, the concept of internationalism was closely associated with trade relations and the power imbalances of colonialism. Colonial exhibitions and human zoos provided 'visual descriptions or evidence' (Dawkins, 2021, p. 2) of power and

possession, aiming to strengthen trade relations and construct a hegemonic understanding of culture by devaluing non-European societies. The title 'Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations' at the 1851 London event promised attraction, yet its design remained tied to colonial exposition practices. In contrast, the first Venice Biennale in 1895 focused on innovation, showcasing international art to promote fraternal international understanding (Fleck, 2009). Almost half of the exhibited works did not originate from the host country, and the 'artistic world tour' (Fleck, 2009, p. 36) encompassed almost all of Europe, Russia and the USA. However, former and existing colonies were not included. According to Fleck (2009), it was not until the 2001 Biennale, titled 'Plateau of Human Kind' by Harald Szeemann, that artworks from all continents were represented.

Postcolonial influences and dynamics in the festival sector

Prior to the emergence of postcolonial discourses in the 1970s and 1980s that promised to redefine the concept of internationality (Cohen et al., 2023), films from former colonies were shown at film festivals. For example, the Cannes Film Festival (1946) served as an early platform for West African filmmaking, albeit consistently outside of the competition (Ostrowska, 2016; Dovey, 2015; Teissl, 2018). In response to the underrepresentation of non-Western productions at major festivals and influenced by pioneering postcolonial studies such as those by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, European countries began to host film festivals with postcolonial program strategies in the 1980s (Dovey, 2015; Teissl, 2018). These festivals focus on self-representation and the mediation of non-Western artworks, pursuing a socio-political discourse that aims to overcome Eurocentric worldviews. While they remain relevant platforms for global art aesthetics, these festivals also risk 'ghettoization' and perpetuating a static understanding of the world and the arts. What criteria are used to select African artworks for display at festivals with a postcolonial focus, or at 'international' festivals?

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, awareness of cultural interaction grew as did an expanded appreciation of international and non-Western arts. This can be regarded as a nonlinear result of postcolonial discourse as well as the outcome of praxeological exhibition mechanisms being further developed through curating, contextualizing and mediating (Enwezor, 2002; Niemojewski, 2021; Dawkins, 2021). For example, at 2001 Biennale and Documenta 2002, non-Western art was positioned through curatorial practice rather than being additionally shown.

Festivals are active cultural producers. Commissioned artworks, post-production and co-production are strategic instruments that promote the internationalization of the arts and culture sector. Post-production funding at major film festivals supports films from economically disadvantaged countries, thereby facilitating their cinematic self-representation and the integration of global aesthetics (Ostrowska, 2010; Campos, 2013). Transnational theatre productions involve transnational

interaction and co-creation during the development of the play (Bühler-Dietrich, 2018). International theatre festivals facilitate postcolonial debate through cooperation with non-Western countries, such as Spielart Munich (1995). The Africologne Festival (2011) sees itself as a European African platform for transcultural exchange. Such co-productions encourage engagement with power relations and reveal colonial continuities in intercultural and transcultural relationships (Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2015; Bühler-Dietrich, 2018).

The development of predominantly Western international programs on postcolonial strategies for achieving a cosmopolitan understanding of the arts is influenced by genre-specific dynamics, production and financing instruments, the reception of critical theories and the visions of festival directors and civil society. Nevertheless, this complex situation cannot avoid genealogical asynchrony and areas of tension.

Funding structures and relational values

The institutional value of festivals is subject to various stakeholder dynamics, which makes establishing relational values correspondingly complex. A distinctive feature of non-Western festival programming is its financing structures, which include national cultural offices, international institutions such as the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and the Goethe-Institute, which has a mandate for international cultural cooperation, as well as public funds for development cooperation. These structures promote international cultural production and dissemination, as well as supporting festivals when national resources are insufficient. However, artists can sometimes be reluctant to the involvement of development cooperation institutions (Teissl, 2018), even if they evolved, like OIF, from an initially constructed commonality among French speakers to discursive cultural diversity in the 1990s (Glasze, 2013).

From a cosmopolitan and postcolonial perspective, curiosity and literacy in global aesthetic artforms are at the forefront. Despite tensions, this can ideally represent the goal of relational values. To date, research into the mutual influence between festivals and national and international funding partners has been lacking.

Towards a global understanding of the arts

In the context of the art and festival worlds, the concept of internationality manifests fluid and inherent discourse. In this sense, internationality rather reflects prevailing worldviews, whereas cosmopolitanism and postcolonialism aim to challenge them. Postcolonial theories are an essential intellectual foundation for overcoming colonial continuities, given the visionary nature of global

citizenship (Purtschert, 2019). Arts festivals play a key role in promoting global citizenship by showcasing diverse global aesthetics, enabling visitors to develop cosmopolitan aesthetic literacy, as advocated by UNESCO (Sassatelli, 2012; Cohen et al., 2023). This occurs not only in programming and financing, but also in reception, as cultural interactions and encounters through artistic artefacts take place. These interactions are influenced by stereotypes, internalized racism, a lack of knowledge about, and curiosity towards, non-Western cultures, as well as Eurocentric knowledge structures (Mbembe, 2014; Dovey, 2015; Purtschert, 2019; Alkin & Kehya, 2025).

In summary, we conclude that festivals create and continue to create a special institutional value for emerging cosmopolitan worldviews through aesthetics (Papastergiadis, 2012; Sassatelli, 2012). In the context of international programs, the significance of cosmopolitan concerns in general, and the extent to which these are reflected in the deliberate integration of non-Western works of art, arises as a question. In our small-scale survey, we asked festival directors about this.

Empirical survey at festivals in Austria

Austria is home to several internationally renowned festivals, not all of which offer an international program. The most prominent of these are the Salzburg Festival (1920), the Bregenz Festival (1946), the Wiener Festwochen (1951), the Viennale – International Film Festival (1960) or the Ars Electronica Festival (1979). Following the Europe-wide festival boom of the 1980s, numerous festivals emerged in all genres and private as well as public ownership. In 2024, Milo Rau, a leading figure in postcolonial discourse, was appointed artistic director of the renowned Vienna Festival, signaling a rising awareness. In a purpose sampling, invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 23 festivals of various genres, age and size in Austria with an international and / or non-western focus in their festival profile to reach a representative cross-section.

Participant Festivals

Fourteen festivals participated, ten of which were evaluable: five film festivals, two music festivals, two interdisciplinary festivals and one media art festival. The answers were provided by the festival directors. The festivals' founding years ranged from before the festival boom (1920, 1960 and 1979) to the 1980s and 1990s (1988, 1992, 1997 and 1998) and the last ten years (2018 and 2023). Seven festivals described themselves as international without a focus on non-Western artworks, one as a festival with a focus, and two festivals defined themselves by a fixed or yearly alternating festival theme with an international program. The mission of the participant festivals includes providing a platform for artistic, audience and industry exchange; contributing to urban and regional development;

and developing art and audiences through cross-genre and interdisciplinary programming. Socio-political discourses play a role in the context of anti-racism, empowerment, peacemaking and social development. Mission and founding motives have a significant influence on the identity of festivals (Getz et al., 2010) and contextualize the roles of international programs.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire contained closed questions and one 10-point nominal scale to assess the relevance of promoting cosmopolitanism through international programming and the inclusion of non-Western artworks in this context. The terms 'international' and 'cosmopolitan' remained without definition in the questionnaire so as not to influence respondents' subjective expertise with predetermined concepts. There was a risk in missing intersubjective understanding. But data analysis suggests a consensus in the associative use of these terms. We also asked the festival directors to assess the importance of international and non-Western programs for the funding partners. The additional questions covered the festivals' founding motive, year and mission, environment, and ownership. The mission and environment provided an enriching context for the motivations behind international programming, whereas ownership did not. The data was analyzed descriptively. Selected results are presented below, along with the limitations, discussion and conclusion.

Findings on cosmopolitanism and internationality

Both the communication of the global diversity of artistic-aesthetic modes of expression for a cosmopolitan understanding and the integration of non-Western art forms for a cosmopolitan understanding of art receive the highest approval (median 10 and 9 respectively). In other words, the contribution to aesthetically based cosmopolitanism is a pronounced motif of international festivals. A deliberate selection of non-Western art pieces, on the other hand, only takes place to a small extent (median of 3.5). Very long-established festivals tend to be less aware of non-Western art than those founded in the 1980s and 1990s. While the distinction between international and non-Western plays a minor to very minor role in program selection (median 7.5), the distinction itself is perceived as relatively important for a cosmopolitan understanding of art (median 6). In other words, there is awareness and concern about selection mechanisms in relation to "international" as "global".

The impact of international and non-Western programs is particularly significant in rural areas, showing that the environment matters. Two participant festivals take place in areas with fewer than 30,000 inhabitants. Here, international programming and cosmopolitan interests are performed through dialogue with traditional forms of expression, offering a unique perspective on cosmopolitanism and community. They also provide global interpretations of the concept of 'home'.

In Austria, this concept is historically charged with the Nazi era and, politically, with the rise of the far right.

Nine of ten festivals estimate that the audience's interest in international and non-Western works has increased since they were founded. A variety of mediation practices have played a significant role in this which connects to the institutional value (Holden, 2006).

Findings on financing and cosmopolitanism

According to the festival directors, internationality is not a prerequisite for the funding of festivals by national funds; one festival's funding provider even wants a higher proportion of artworks with "national content." Four festivals reported co-financing by international institutions, two of which refer to a European focus and corresponding funds. For two festivals, the focus on non-Western artworks plays a role in funding opportunities from international institutions. Three festivals see themselves as raising awareness among funding institutions. They share the socio-political goal of promoting dialogue through international programs, one of which focuses on non-Western artworks.

The desire for more 'national content' at a film festival may stem from the pragmatic intention to promote domestic film production more effectively. In contrast, the perception of the funding and relational dynamics of international programs highlights the potential value of cosmopolitan engagement. Although international programs represent established norms, they are not consciously associated with an impact such as gaining an understanding of the world through a global aesthetic. Cosmopolitanism is not a typical funding motive for national programs. In countries of new immigration such as Austria and Germany, intercultural orientations are favored in art and cultural programs. However, in terms of strengthening democracy and international understanding, an 'artistic world tour' with a global reach can transform an intrinsic approach into an extrinsic potential and represent a relational value.

Limitations and need for further research

Although the purpose sampling helped to sharpen the findings, it also resulted in a low response rate and a lack of diversity in the sectors, which limits the reliability and validity of the survey. Further research is needed in the form of a broader survey and complementary program analysis. An in-depth qualitative research design would best enable us to learn more about the inherent selection mechanisms relating to non-Western art. To avoid a schematic notion of internationalization and cosmopolitanism, and to identify further special potential, the profiles, missions and spatial environments of festivals must be considered in greater depth. The study of audience interest and

the communication needs of different target groups is an essential area of research and is fundamental to relational values. Questions regarding target groups could not be evaluated. However, the following quote from a festival director reflects the urgent need to increase resources and skills for audience development: 'By focusing on topics that affect us all equally, we can appeal to everyone. Effective communication can be challenging; sometimes, different approaches are necessary.'

Conclusion

This article used art festivals as an example to discuss the intrinsic concerns of cultural organizations, and how these concerns could inform relational values in policy making. Festivals were considered as events of institutional value in the context of international programs and their associated cosmopolitan aesthetics (Sassatelli, 2012). Festivals that focus on non-Western art remain relevant, as they stimulate dynamics within the field including funding bodies. The concept of 'international' is tied to contemporary worldviews and is therefore ambivalent; postcolonial and cosmopolitan discourses are relevant influencing factors in favor of global 'arts' citizenship. Finally, a cosmopolitan understanding of the arts has the potential to transcend national and geopolitical funding interests. Art carries qualities that transcend instrumental intentions, making cosmopolitanism an effective, non-reductionist relational value.

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Between Art and Advocacy: Social Housing Public Art in Taiwan's Distributed Governance Framework

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan's public art regulations began in 1992, mandating one percent of public construction budgets for public art installations. Subsequent regulations required implementing agencies to execute installations independently, embodying "distributed governance" and "cultural democracy" principles that encourage agencies to plan autonomously based on local contexts. However, this distributed governance principle lacks adequate supporting measures, resulting in implementing agencies' insufficient artistic expertise while interpretation authority falls largely to agencies and frontline personnel. Legal amendments since 2008 have fundamentally broadened statutory public art definitions, significantly increasing community participation funding ratios. This dual relaxation of artistic definitions and budget allocations raises concerns about evaluating implementation effectiveness. This research particularly examines public art installations in social housing—domains directly related to residents' lives. Through case analysis, regulatory comparisons, and stakeholder interviews, this preliminary

Keywords:

Social housing,
Public art, Social
turn, Community
development,
Distributed
governance

study proposes that Taiwan's social housing public art requires fundamental examination at both institutional and conceptual levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper presents a cultural policy-oriented reflection based on my involvement in the 2024–2025 research project "Investigation of Public Art Implementation in Taiwan's Social Housing and International Case Studies," commissioned by the National Housing and Urban Regeneration Center (HURC) and carried out by the Association of the Visual Arts in Taiwan (AVAT).

I am sincerely grateful to AVAT for their continued support and guidance throughout this research process—especially to our project director, Chen Bogu, for his kind attention to both my research progress and daily life. I deeply appreciate Secretary-General Tsai Ping-Ju and the entire secretariat for their meticulous project management and administrative support, which allowed me to focus on my research work. Additionally, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my graduate program director Lu Pei-Yi and my advisor Thanavi Chotpradit, who have long provided many valuable insights and advice on my writing.

Introduction

The 2017 Housing Act established "social housing" as "housing and necessary ancillary facilities built by the government or by the private sector with subsidies from the government that is primarily rented," (Ministry of Interior, 2017) marking Taiwan's housing policy finally establishing a clear policy direction after nearly a century of exploration and experimentation. With the government's promotion of the phased goal of "200,000 social housing units in eight years" (2017-2024), the massive influx of social housing construction funds in a short period, according to Article 15 of the Culture and the Arts Reward and Promotion Act, which stipulates that "The commissioning agency (organization) arranging for the construction of a public building or launch of a major construction project shall also provide for public art to create an aesthetic environment. The fee for this shall not be less than one percent of the total cost of the building or public construction project," has correspondingly generated substantial demand for art installations and funding.

However, whether the current Regulations on the Installation of Public Art fully apply to the unique field characteristics of social housing has become an urgent issue requiring examination. Although social housing, based on its "rental-only" nature, is classified as public infrastructure, its spatial attributes exist between public and private domains. This ambiguous boundary not only challenges traditional public art definitions and perceptions of "public space," but the massive art installation funding generated by large-scale social housing construction also makes this cultural expenditure

derived from engineering budgets urgently require comprehensive policy evaluation and strategic planning.

Policy Context: Institutional Convergence and Distributed Governance

Reviewing Taiwan's housing policy development since the implementation of the 1975 Public Housing Act, the public housing system has experimented with diverse tenure models: rental housing for government employees (later expanded to disadvantaged groups), rent-free low-cost housing for the lowest-income households in the 1980s, limited ownership models during Chen Shui-bian's Taipei mayorship in the 1990s, and transitional affordable housing solutions after 2010. These housing types showed significant differences in nomenclature, ownership models, fee structures, and target populations, reflecting different philosophies and strategies for solving housing problems in different periods.

It was not until the government ceased public housing construction in 1999 and affordable housing was discontinued due to corruption scandals in 2014 that Taiwan's housing policy gradually shifted from the early ownership-oriented model to a rental-based social welfare mechanism. From the 2013 Executive Yuan's abolition of the Public Housing Act to the 2017 promulgation and implementation of the Housing Act, not only was the "rental-only" social housing model established, but related mechanisms, nomenclature definitions, application and management methods also became more comprehensive, with policy fluctuations gradually stabilizing. This policy transformation responded to Taiwan society's long-term demands for housing justice since the 1989 Snails without Shells Movement and practically laid the legal foundation for the government's promotion of the "200,000 social housing units in eight years" policy goal. In 2018, the Ministry of the Interior, in accordance with Article 8 of the Housing Act, established the National Housing and Urban Regeneration Center (HURC), the first administrative corporation for central government-led social housing construction²⁶⁵, further highlighting the government's emphasis on housing rights reform.

Simultaneously, the development trajectory of Taiwan's public art system also intersected with housing policy in an unprecedented way during this period. Tracing the regulatory evolution of public art in Taiwan, it was initially implemented in 1992 when the Council for Cultural Affairs (predecessor

²⁶⁵ An administrative corporation is a type of public juristic person established in Taiwan to enhance the efficiency and quality of public service delivery. Characterized by personnel and financial autonomy, it operates beyond the constraints of traditional administrative regulations. Originating from the administrative reform movements of the 1980s in countries like the UK and the US, it adopts a corporatized management model to improve flexibility and effectiveness in public affairs without increasing government expenditure.

to the Ministry of Culture) promulgated the Culture and the Arts Reward and Promotion Act, introducing France's "percentage for art" regulations (*Loi du 1%*) to Taiwan. Article 5 of the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, announced and implemented by the Council for Cultural Affairs in 1998, explicitly stipulated: "When commissioning agencies (institutions) undertake public buildings or major public works, they shall establish an executive task force responsible for formulating, submitting for review, and executing public art installation plans and other administrative matters." (Chou, 2015) This mandated that public art installation be executed by the commissioning agencies.

In 1998, the Council for Cultural Affairs adopted a decentralized implementation model through the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, mandating that all commissioning agencies execute public art projects independently. This approach, drawing from Community Empowerment principles, prioritized public participation and established the foundational framework for public art implementation across all agencies (Chou, 2015). The core philosophy of this institutional design was to entrust the authority and execution of public art to commissioning agencies and local governments at all levels for active participation, rather than adopting a centrally controlled unified contracting or execution model. Instead, it encouraged local commissioning agencies to actively participate, plan, and execute to respond to different spatial contexts and socio-cultural needs.

This approach—encouraging autonomous implementation by local governments rather than central control—embodies cultural democracy and distributed governance. The Council for Cultural Affairs established supporting mechanisms including review committees and cross-departmental coordination requirements, enabling agencies to tailor projects to their specific contexts while ensuring quality and procedural justice.

However, these vastly different site types following the same set of installation regulations meant that the compatibility of the installation regulations had to be extremely high, providing only a principled framework for implementation procedures, with actual detailed responsibilities falling to the commissioning agencies. This distributed approach designed to promote universal implementation failed to adequately consider Taiwan's limited institutional capacity and underestimated the complexity and specialized nature of public art, creating the fundamental challenge underlying Taiwan's current public art policy difficulties (Chou, 2015). This means that professional concerns under the principle of distributed governance still have not received fundamental solutions in the cultural policy field.

The 2008 revision of the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art marked an important turning point in Taiwan's public art policy: "To respond to the transformation of public art operational concepts into 'project' forms, the original wording 'public art installation' was revised to 'public art installation project' to implement the principles of 'public participation,' 'environmental integration,' and

'publicness,' promoting new development and presentation of Taiwan's public art." (Chen & Chou, 2021) Although this aligned with Claire Bishop's concept of contemporary art's social turn, emphasizing citizen empowerment and participation through issue-oriented, project-based approaches that responded to dialogical creation principles and overcame traditional installation limitations (Chen & Chou, 2021), this institutional adjustment also provided greater flexibility for commissioning agencies in budget utilization but did not simultaneously construct detailed case type classifications and policy support, leading to many ambiguous areas in implementation.

Specifically, while this revision hoped that artists could break free from traditional static artwork installation mindsets and demonstrate more socially participatory projects, it also significantly broadened the potential scope of contractor unit types for installation projects, enabling construction and design units without artistic professional backgrounds to enter public art project sites more frequently. Although such units had already occupied a place in practice since the 1992 implementation of the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, this regulatory change further strengthened and legitimized this trend, making projects that should have been led by artistic professionals gradually incline toward engineering-oriented and social welfare compensating paths. In the absence of clear artistic standards and detailed policy support, this liberalization mechanism substantially transferred the public responsibility and cultural review responsibilities that should have been borne by institutions to market operations and individual commissioning agencies' own judgment.

Instrumentalization Tendencies in Social Housing Public Art

When social housing policy and public art systems intersected at the legal level, challenges and contradictions at the implementation level immediately emerged. Early social housing promotion in Taipei faced considerable public resistance, with some sites encountering significant community opposition and protest activities (Lin, 2025). Therefore, the Department of Urban Development, Taipei City Government commissioned Artfield Co., Ltd. in 2018 to execute the "Preliminary Planning for Public Art Installation in Taipei Public Housing," establishing a comprehensive framework for social housing public art for the numerous upcoming tender cases, proposing core concepts, installation principles, and exploring the role public art could play in social housing.

Recognizing the massive number of subsequent public art cases, the Department of Urban Development, Taipei City Government acknowledged that the curation of public art for over forty planned social housing sites required integration with urban design principles (Lin, 2025). Artfield's report positioned social housing public art as a "new urban cultural movement," proposing ten implementation approaches ranging from street furniture integration to local revitalization projects.

The report emphasized collaboration between art, urban design, and architectural principles to promote community interaction and address urban challenges.

This report previewed the diverse implementation directions for social housing public art nationwide, including the 2018 social design approach by Happen Social Design in Taichung, the 2021 television series by GrX Studio in the Linkou Athletes' Village Social Housing project, and the 2021 local art festival by Waley Art in Taipei's Wanhua District social housing projects. These diverse implementation methods all follow the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, showing that the regulations only provide a principled implementation framework, with actual installation types and contract contents entirely determined by commissioning agencies.

However, while the report emphasized aesthetic discourse that progressed alongside urban development and social participation, actual operations revealed highly instrumentalized tendencies in art. Most practical forms were oriented toward corresponding to specific policy objectives, treating art as a means to promote urban aesthetics, social integration, spatial activation, and other public tasks. Under this thinking, art was not only integrated into administrative mechanisms and engineering processes but often became an auxiliary device to architectural or governance logic, struggling to maintain its critical, autonomous, and formal exploratory space.

Although Bishop had already critiqued the problematic relationship between participatory art and European cultural policy, particularly how such art became instrumentalized alongside welfare state reductions in her influential 2012 work *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Bishop, 2012: 5), particularly the New Labor period in Britain (1997-2010) using "social exclusion" as a slogan, treating participatory "art as a form of soft social engineering," overestimating the evaluative effectiveness of quantifiable indicators (such as participation numbers and activity sessions) while neglecting art's formal innovation and aesthetic experience. Yet Taiwan's social housing public art-related implementation guidelines still march resolutely in similar directions. Another clear implementation framework concept from this preliminary planning was to repackage the public participation projects in the relaxed "statutory public art" since the 2008 Regulations on the Installation of Public Art revision—those opposed to permanent works—as "Artistic Social Engineering." Although it did not explicitly state its connection to New Labor policies, its rhetoric similarly highlighted the instrumentalization tendencies behind its thinking mode.

Based on public art installation funding derived from one percent of engineering costs and implemented by commissioning agencies themselves, given that (most) commissioning agencies do not necessarily have cultural and artistic professional backgrounds and concepts, combined with the interpretive space in the Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, commissioning agencies often treat it as a budget item that can be skillfully reallocated, not necessarily investing in actual artists or art teams. For example, the Linkou case used funds for television production (as housing policy

promotion, so its intended audience was the general viewing public rather than social housing residents), the Guangci case invited architects to fill some public space corridors, the Xinglong case installed a bus stop... These needs lack consistency, showing that commissioning agencies use the relatively flexible public art budget to supplement whatever aspects their sites lack.

Taking the 2021 "Linkou Athletes' Village Social Housing Phase I Public Art Installation Project" as an example²⁶⁶, the commissioning agency, HURC, divided this project into two sub-plans, with Sub-plan A (executed by Collaborative O. Company) centered on "relational aesthetics," investing four years in community cultivation through public participation action research, emphasizing three major aspects: sustainable development, site-specific art, and public participation, assisting artists in translating local cultural history for creation—a common implementation method for new types of public art. Sub-plan B (executed by GrX Studio) unusually opened tenders in the direction of "television series," ultimately producing one season of five episodes titled *The Thrifty Family*, demonstrating the current freedom of the installation regulations in both project execution and budget utilization.

According to HURC project personnel describing the original design concept of splitting the project into sub-plans, the collaborative model was designed to facilitate regular communication between teams through scheduled meetings, enabling Sub-plan B to access community engagement data from Sub-plan A for script development purposes. This approach aimed to create content that more accurately reflected the actual living conditions of social housing residents. While this collaborative model idealistically expected Sub-plan B to build on Sub-plan A's field data, it caused practical challenges. Fieldwork ethics and residents' inability to distinguish between sub-plans led to community disputes—especially since residents were under no obligation to understand the internal division.

Project implementation revealed significant operational difficulties with the multi-contractor approach. Field work ethics became complicated when different teams were expected to share community data, raising concerns about consent procedures and relationship management with residents. The Sub-plan A contractor expressed frustration that residents did not differentiate between the two sub-plans when providing feedback, often attributing responsibility for one team's work to another. Additionally, contractors identified challenges with data-sharing requirements between teams, particularly regarding field ethics protocols and consent procedures for information disclosure.

²⁶⁶ The Linkou social housing was transformed from the 2017 Universiade Athletes' Village, located in New Taipei City's Linkou District, covering 17.2 hectares with 3,490 units—Taiwan's currently largest social housing complex. The demographic includes 7% indigenous residents, the highest proportion nationwide.

Fundamental value differences also emerged between contractors regarding appropriate community representation. Conflicts arose over the portrayal of social housing residents, with disagreements about the use of potentially stigmatizing themes or terminology. For instance, initial proposals included naming the television series "The Petty Family," which was viewed as potentially creating negative stereotypes about social housing residents. These concerns led to negotiations and compromise, ultimately resulting in more neutral approaches such as the final title *The Thrifty Family*.

Although *The Thrifty Family* received a Golden Bell Award nomination in 2024, indicating it achieved a certain filming standard in the public eye, the television series broadcast by Sanlih E-Television, a Taiwanese nationwide cable TV network, unexpectedly failed to avoid negative implications about social housing and even still needed to use such negative stereotypes as the core script concept. The television series follows a five-member family who move into social housing after a developer's bankruptcy derails their plans. To save for a new home, they launch a "whole-family money-saving challenge," with the three children competing to see who can save the most—starting with everyday efforts like reusing resources, recycling, and cutting back on expenses. Along the way, the family gradually connects with other residents, including single-parent households and elderly neighbors, prompting a rethinking of what "home" means. The series highlights the pressures of high housing costs while portraying social housing as a space for diverse, shared living.

However, a Linkou social housing resident noted in an anonymous interview: "But I think when they were handling the public art material, I was very... I can't say inconsistent, but very disapproving. Because their imagination of social housing was actually speculative, and the entire television series's definition of social housing was 'saving money, then to buy a house.' Just this definition alone is problematic. Don't you know what the essence of social housing is? How could you think it's about saving money to buy a house? What kind of strange definition is this." (personal communication, October 8, 2024) This critique highlights how *The Thrifty Family's* script, from its initial character design, had already departed from the principle of social housing as a long-term, universal housing option. Instead, it reinforced homeownership as the ultimate goal—treating social housing merely as a temporary stopgap. For instance, in the first episode, the father tells his son: "In an era like now where everything changes quickly, a house is a person's sense of security."

Social housing should function as a social welfare mechanism guaranteeing housing rights, not merely a substitute for market failures. However, current short-term lease models (three to six years) with low lottery rates indicate that social housing has not yet achieved its potential as a universal housing option. Since 2024, policy discussions have emerged around expanding from "rental-only" to "long-term usage rights" models (Luo, 2025).

Institutional Dilemmas and Legal Reform Challenges

Due to commissioning agencies' limited familiarity with public art and the lengthy administrative procedures involved, managing such projects places a heavy burden on their human resources. Given the current social environment's heightened expectations for civil service accountability, public administrators already face significant challenges in their regular duties, making the specialized demands of arts administration particularly daunting (Lin, 2025). Originally, agencies mainly used an outsourcing approach, relying on external professionals for implementation support. Over time, these administrative contractors gradually took over decision-making and execution roles that should belong to public bodies, creating dependency and imbalance. This not only reduces policy intentions to mere formality but also raises questions about supervision and fairness.

In 2024, the Control Yuan issued a corrective case against the Ministry of Culture, pointing out numerous persistent problems accumulated over 30 years since the installation regulations were implemented, prompting what was called "the largest-scale legal reform in history" (Control Yuan, 2024). The investigation report pointed out that the current approach of requiring one percent public art funding across the board regardless of scale will lead to chaos at both extremely small and extremely large ends of the public art funding spectrum. The Control Yuan commissioners used the "Taipei Public Housing Five Sites Construction Public Art Installation Project" as an excellent exemplary case: combining the public housing budgets of five sites into one cross-domain, cross-residential area large-scale public art project, with content including not only permanent works but also artistic actions and residency public art creation, presenting diverse forms of public art and enabling more appropriate, softer entry into community residents' lives (Control Yuan, 2024).

The Control Yuan also suggested that social housing cases are increasing daily, and those adopting this integrated self-implementation approach are still few. It is recommended to absorb the successful experience of this case as a reference for similar project implementation models (Control Yuan, 2024). In reality, this is precisely the tacit tender strategy for all social housing public art nationwide. Basically, all similar projects nationwide are currently handled in an "integrated" manner. "Based on social housing site location conditions, scale, and total budget amount, public art curatorial projects are promoted in phases and regions, not limited to single sites, integrating multiple sites into one case" (Lin, 2025).

After the 2024 corrective case, although it did not directly prohibit the administrative agency mechanism, it only renamed administrative agencies as "project management contractors" and amended laws to regulate service items that project management contractors may provide and interest avoidance and violation handling measures for various roles in the public art system. While the amendment direction was positive, the work restrictions on administrative agencies may further exacerbate the already insufficient human resource capacity of commissioning agencies. Under the

distributed governance policy framework, relevant units responsible for social housing public art in various counties and cities already face insufficient human resources. The new version of public art amendments can be expected to make commissioning agencies' human resource capacity even more strained.

Current implementation shows that Taipei, New Taipei, Taoyuan, Taichung, and HURC all use "integrated self-implementation" approaches, combining multiple sites into single projects to reduce administrative workload while allowing budget flexibility. However, extended implementation periods reduce contractor interest and may compromise artistic quality.

As Artfield's report noted, urban governance creates coordination challenges: the implementation of social housing public art in Taipei involves at least the following municipal departments: Public Works Department, Parks and Street Lights Office, District Offices, Department of Transportation, Department of Social Welfare, Department of Education, Department of Tourism, and Department of Cultural Affairs, requiring active integration and coordination among all involved units to achieve consensus on installation schemes.

This research argues that "public art" should be understood as a procedural concept rather than an artistic style—referring to the institutional framework created when art enters cultural policy procedures. The ambiguity in regulations reflects space for cultural democratic practice but creates a double-edged situation: without clear standards, implementation often faces coordination difficulties and unclear value criteria, particularly challenging for the emerging social housing field.

Conclusion

The development of Taiwan's social housing public art fully demonstrates the complexity and contradictions of cultural policy practice under distributed governance frameworks. From the distributed execution model established by the 1998 Regulations on the Installation of Public Art, to the project-oriented flexibility introduced by the 2008 amendment, to the current execution challenges brought by massive social housing construction, this series of policy evolution reflects the continuing tension between Taiwan's cultural democratic ideals and practical execution capabilities.

The problems exposed by the Linkou social housing case are not merely technical difficulties at the individual execution level, but more fundamentally reveal potential value conflicts and the loss of policy focus when art becomes overly instrumentalized as a social policy tool. When public art is expected to fulfill multiple functions—social integration, policy promotion, and spatial beautification—art's inherent criticality and autonomy are often diluted, ultimately potentially departing from its original intention as a cultural policy instrument.

Although the 2024 Control Yuan corrective case attempted to improve implementation-level problems through institutional adjustments, under the unchanged basic framework of distributed governance, structural problems such as insufficient professional capabilities and scarce human resources at all levels of commissioning agencies still exist. While integrated implementation methods alleviate resource dispersion problems to some extent, they may also reduce overall execution quality due to extended implementation periods and complicated administrative coordination.

More fundamentally, current social housing public art practices often lack a deep understanding of social housing as a "universal housing option"—this policy aspiration. As the Linkou case demonstrates, when television series still use "saving money to buy houses" as core narrative, it actually strengthens rather than challenges existing housing commodification logic, forming fundamental contradictions with "rental-only" policy principles.

Therefore, future development of Taiwan's social housing public art requires not only more detailed supporting design at institutional levels but also fundamental reconsideration of relationships between art and policy, aesthetics and governance at conceptual levels. Given the structural challenges identified in this research, commissioning agencies should promptly reassess the near-future workload of social housing public art projects and their existing human resource capacity. If the project volume is sufficiently large or human resources are genuinely overwhelmed, commissioning agencies should expeditiously establish full-time staff with artistic professional backgrounds or specialized public art departments within their institutions.

Only through such systemic reforms can public art truly return to its essence as cultural practice rather than serving merely as mandated policy implementation and a public financial and administrative burden, thereby realizing appropriate cultural value and social significance in social housing domains.

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The role of public music schools to guarantee cultural rights

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ABSTRACT

Currently, a parliamentary debate is being conducted on cultural rights in several Autonomous communities of Spain. The initial hypothesis of this project is that public music schools are centres that can guarantee the access rights and participation in cultural life because they are spaces where citizens can develop their creativity and take part in cultural activities. The conclusion reached during this investigation is that the legal definition of music schools as educational centres hinders this guarantee. Firstly, public music schools are not legally classified as cultural facilities, and the aforementioned rights are limited to the cultural sector. Secondly, the regional and state legal framework does not establish mechanisms to ensure all citizens access to public music schools under equal conditions. The new regulation of Cultural Rights should establish collaborative mechanisms between different areas and pay special attention to the link between culture and education.

Keywords:

Artistic education

Music schools

Cultural rights

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The publication and results are supported by the AGAUR-FI predoctoral grants program (2025 FI-3 00065) Joan Oró, provided by the Secretariat for Universities and Research of the Department of Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia, and the European Social Fund Plus.

The scope of cultural rights

Cultural rights are primarily founded upon two key international standards: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter ICESCR). Article 27 of the UDHR is considered the core of these rights, recognizing that "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits". The ICESCR, for its part, stipulates in Article 15.1 that States Parties to the Covenant shall recognize the right of everyone to "participate in cultural life". This constitutes a legally binding obligation for States Parties, which must take "the steps necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture" (Art. 15.2 of the ICESCR).

The United Nations has granted cultural rights the status of being universal, indivisible and interdependent, as they form part of human rights (UN: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2009 § 1). Furthermore, they stipulate that cultural rights can be inseparably linked to other human rights. The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Alexandra Xanthaki, particularly emphasizes the right to education (UN: Human Rights Council, 2022 § 37). Through education, every person can come to know and understand their own culture and that of others (UN: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2009 § 15).

The ICESCR and the UDHR understand the right to participation as that which guarantees every person the ability to exercise their own cultural practices and to seek, develop, and share their cultural knowledge and expressions with others, as well as to participate in creative activities (UN: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2009 § 15). The State's action to guarantee this is dual. It must not interfere in cultural practices, but it must also take positive measures to ensure the preconditions for participation, promoting and facilitating it (Art. 7 of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions). "It is necessary to preserve existing spaces and institutions, and to create new ones, so that people can learn and develop their creativity" (UN: Human Rights Council, 2017 § 25). Artistic education centres, such as music schools, are part of these spaces.

The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights also highlights the existence of a link between culture and education. The Declaration does not have a normative character but systematizes rights already recognized, albeit dispersed, in other legal instruments. In the words of Dr. Patrice Meyer-Bisch, director of the Fribourg Group:

"The eight cultural rights, as set out in the Fribourg Declaration, make up particularly interesting ecosystemic loops. They involve choosing and seeing one's own identity respected, knowing and having one's own culture respected as well as the other cultures, having access to cultural heritages,

relating or not to cultural communities, participating in cultural life, rights to training (education), to information and cultural cooperation” (Meyer-Bisch, 2013:9).

Education is one of the central pillars of the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights. However, despite the latent link between education and culture in these foundational documents on cultural rights, a division between both subjects, administrative and legal, exists at the European, national, regional, and local levels.

As previously noted, the European Union conceives both subjects separately; culture on one hand, and education, vocational training, youth, and sport on the other (Arts. 6.c, 6.e, 165, 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). Furthermore, the Treaty on the Functioning explicitly considers only the social and educational function of sport, not culture. Nevertheless, in these areas, the role of member states predominates over that of the European Union, which is only recognized with subsidiary and complementary competences.

Legal framework for music schools in Spain

At the national level, the material division between culture and education is replicated in the Spanish Constitution. The Constitution recognizes the right of access to culture in Article 44.1 as a guiding principle: “public authorities shall promote and safeguard access to culture, to which everyone has the right”; and the right to participate in cultural life in Article 9.2: “it is incumbent upon the public authorities to promote conditions for the freedom and equality of the individual and of the groups in which they are integrated to be real and effective; to remove obstacles that impede or hinder their fullness and to facilitate the participation of all citizens in political, economic, cultural, and social life”.

The right to education is recognized in Article 27 of the Constitution as a fundamental right. Section four proclaims the free and compulsory nature of basic education. Besides, Article 149.1.30 of the Constitution recognizes that education is a shared matter between the State and the Autonomous Communities, although the general organization of the education system is the exclusive competence of the State.

The general organization of the education system is regulated by the Organic Law 3/2020, 29 December, which is popularly known as LOMLOE. The studies that form part of the education system include artistic education, as a special regime, such as language and sports education (Art. 3 of LOMLOE).

The chapter VI of the Law, concerning artistic education, provides for elementary, professional, and higher music studies. The completion of professional studies at a music conservatory grants the right

to obtain a qualification (Art. 50 of LOMLOE), and in the case of students who have completed higher music studies at a higher music centre, they will obtain the Degree in Higher Artistic Education (Art. 54.3 of LOMLOE). In contrast, elementary studies do not lead to the obtainment of a qualification with academic or professional validity, these may be pursued in music schools. Music schools are recognized in Article 48.3 of LOMLOE, and the Autonomous Communities have the competence regarding music schools. In the case of Catalonia, it was approved the Decree 354/2021, of September 14, concerning schools that provide non-regulated music and dance education. Article 2 reveals that the objectives of music schools are intrinsically linked to the rights of access and cultural participation:

“a) To foster interest in music and dance, respectively, from childhood throughout life, and to address the broad social demand for artistic culture (practice in these fields) connected to both practice and the social context.

f) To contribute to the cohesion, inclusion, and social awareness of the environment by providing citizens with access to musical and dance activities”.

Nevertheless, the Decree does not provide mechanisms to ensure citizens' access to these centres, in accordance with the framework of special regime education that don't recognize the universality and free nature of these teachings.

Nowadays, the provision of artistic education is limited, influenced by socioeconomic factors and does not equally cover all age groups. Legally, public music schools ensure the rights of access and cultural participation for the segment of the population that can gain admission and become students. As an educational centre, the applicable regulations for music schools primarily consider individuals with a direct connection to the institution, outlining rights and duties only for specific groups: teachers, students, families, and administrative and service staff.

Economic measures or aid aimed at reducing fees for public music schools originate from local entities. A study published by the Intermunicipal Comparison Circles, which includes forty-two municipalities in the province of Barcelona, highlights that most municipalities currently implement one of the following actions: social pricing policies, provision of aid or bonuses, and the establishment of affordable public prices. The same study indicates that local entities cover almost the entire cost of the service. The other primary source of funding is the public fee paid by users. Therefore, placing the burden of economic aid for access to these centres on local entities proves to be very costly, especially for small municipalities (Diputació de Barcelona, 2021:48-69).

However, Catalan cultural facilities which are outlined in the Cultural Facilities Plan, that include archives, libraries, museums, performing arts venues, visual arts spaces, multipurpose and new-

generation cultural centres, recognises the right of citizens to equal access to culture. The plan proposes the following actions (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2010:18):

- “Provide infrastructure to ensure equal opportunities for the entire population to access culture and minimize barriers limiting this access.
- Achieve a balanced territorial distribution of cultural facilities, so travel distance and associated mobility don't act as deterrents for the population.
- Contribute to consolidating public cultural service systems within a network that guarantees cultural activity and consequently citizens' access to culture”.

Since music schools in Catalonia are not classified as cultural facilities, the aforementioned actions do not apply to them. Furthermore, due to their special education status, they cannot benefit from the universality and free access of basic education, nor from other mechanisms that would ensure citizen access.

Approaches to guarantee cultural access and participation rights

The administrative and regulatory division between culture and education, along with the lack of collaborative frameworks between these two spheres, generates a situation where cultural rights are framed exclusively within the cultural.

Public music schools can serve as spaces where individuals can seek, develop, and share cultural expressions and participate in creative activities that is, to participate in cultural life. “Today's educational processes are a product of our culture and simultaneously facilitate the construction of tomorrow's culture. In this reciprocal process, municipalities are key actors in the formation of individuals, and cultural policies can become an educational tool” (Diputació de Barcelona, 2022).

For this to occur, access to these centres must be guaranteed. The legal instruments that can be used for this purpose, and which will be analysed in this chapter, are the effective categorization of music schools as a local public service and the regulation of cultural rights. These will be presented independently, although nothing prevents them from being applied jointly. Firstly, consolidating these centres as a public service will allow the common rules of all public services: continuity, equality, and constant adaptation. Secondly, legislation on cultural rights can open mechanisms for cross-departmental coordination encompassing education, social services, environment and economy, besides mechanisms for action to ensure these rights” (Diputació de Barcelona, 2022).

Cultural public service

It is complex to establish a clear definition of public service due to the heterogeneity of public services and a lack of legal specificity (Miguez Macho, 1999:82). However, we could state that this administrative activity aims to guarantee citizens' rights or ensure the satisfaction of collective needs, based on the idea of general interest (Malaret i Garcia, 1998:50-63).

Some authors, from a material perspective, differentiate between the provision of services itself and the provision of infrastructure for these services (Ortega Bernardo, 2017:75). But ultimately, there is always a public service mission that will provide a benefit to users, which is essential for the citizen's development and an element of social cohesion (Malaret i Garcia, 1998:87).

Education embodies the stated premises of public service; however, this concept is exclusively referenced within the preamble of the LOMLOE. This situation can be interpreted in two ways: the legislator, acting in accordance with the constitutional mandate of Article 27.5, already presumes that education is a public service, or that, currently, the legislator wishes to maintain a certain caution when using the term public service in the educational sphere. Personally, I lean more towards the first theory, although some authors, arguing that the creation of public services requires a certain lack of private initiative, question the public educational service (López García, 2018:117). However, the establishment of a public service does not necessarily entail the elimination of private provisions in the sector. The public service must respect a certain competitive environment, unless there is a monopoly regime (Malaret i Garcia, 1998:53).

The Law 7/1985, of April 2, Regulating the Bases of Local Regime, expressly contemplates the existence of local public services that can be mandatory or optional. They will be mandatory when specified by law. Since music schools are not a mandatory public service activity by law, a decision by political authorities, who have democratic legitimacy, is necessary for their establishment (Martínez-Alonso Camps, 2007:62-63).

The French cultural public service can be seen as a new approach. In Spain, the concept of cultural public service is not recognized legally or through jurisprudence. In contrast, France does have this concept. As Professor Gaston Jèze put it, public service is the cornerstone of French administrative law (Mercier, 2010:41). This uniqueness of French law, coupled with the significant cultural involvement of French public administrations, has likely fostered the creation of this distinct category of public service.

The jurisprudential evolution of the French Council of State regarding the creation of the legal concept of cultural public service concludes by affirming that music schools are a public service of general interest, and everyone has the right to access them under equal conditions (CE December 29, 1997, concerning the Commune of Nanterre).

"The operation of the Nanterre music conservatory constitutes an optional administrative public service; that in view of the general interest that this music conservatory entails, and in order that it may be attended by students who wish to do so, without distinction according to their financial means, the municipal council of Nanterre has been able, without violating the principle of equality among public service users, to set different enrolment fees according to family income, provided that the highest fees remain lower than the cost per student of operating the school."

It also highlights the implications of music schools in the cultural sphere, to the extent that they are even located within the area of culture. However, what ultimately becomes most relevant, in terms of organizational scope, is that as early as Decree No. 2017-1077 of May 24, 2017, concerning the attributions of the Minister of Culture, emphasis is placed on the need to establish collaboration mechanisms between different ministries to define and execute artistic education policies.

Regulation of Cultural Rights

Current cultural Spanish legislation "[responds] to a sectoral logic, necessary at first, but one which needs to advance and place people at the centre, as they are ultimately the beneficiaries of these policies" (Departament de Cultura, 2022:7). Traditionally, cultural legislation has not directly addressed the right of access and participation in cultural life, nor the provision of spaces that guarantee these rights (Carbó, 2022). However, a paradigm shift is currently underway.

The Foral Parliament of Navarra approved the first law on cultural rights in Spain, Navarra Foral Law 1/2019, of January 15, on Cultural Rights. In recent legislatures, other autonomous parliaments have integrated cultural rights into their parliamentary debates.

On April 6, 2022, the Parliament of Andalusia debated whether to accept a legislative initiative from eleven Andalusian municipalities for an Andalusian Culture Law that would recognize cultural rights (Parlamento de Andalucía, 2022:53). On June 14, 2022, the Government of Catalonia approved the preliminary draft of the Cultural Rights Law (Departament de Cultura, 2022). On September 27, 2022, the Más Madrid parliamentary group presented a Cultural Rights Law to the Assembly of Madrid (Asamblea de Madrid, 2022). "Finally, the Parliament of the Canary Islands approved Law 1/2023, of March 1, on the Public System of Culture of the Canary Islands, which regulates organizations that ensure the effective exercise of cultural rights. However, the initiatives in the Parliament of Andalusia and the Assembly of Madrid did not prosper.

The only predecessor of the future Catalan law in cultural rights is the Navarra Foral Law 1/2019, of January 15, on Cultural Rights. Unfortunately, most of its articles focus on regulating areas within the competence of the Autonomous Community's Department of Culture, such as cultural centres,

museums, archives, libraries, theatres, auditoriums, cultural heritage assets... Furthermore, it does not recognize that cultural mediation, understood as the process that facilitates citizens' understanding of artistic expression codes and the construction of meaning, can be carried out by music schools (Art. 9 of Navarra Foral Law 1/2019, of January 15, on Cultural Rights). Only Article 33.4 is referred to artistic education, when determine the areas of collaboration between the Department of Culture and other departments:

- a) It will collaborate with the competent department in education to:
 - i) Strengthen and expand artistic and cultural education within the educational system.
 - ii) Reinforce the role of culture in education, promoting the development of initiatives that allow access to it and its knowledge from childhood and adolescence to contribute to the development of their cognitive, artistic, and creative capacities.

The collaboration regime with the education department is the same as with the department competent in tourism and is even equated with the participation regime of cultural agents, educational institutions, creators, promoters, and citizens in general.

One of the challenges for the new Catalan law will be to overcome the existing competence separation between education and culture within the Government of Catalonia. The transversality of cultural rights may be compromised if addressed solely from the cultural sphere.

Local governments have been pioneers in promoting cultural rights. "If we adhere to the principle of subsidiarity, local administrations are precisely the public entity with the greatest legitimacy to assume the promotion of cultural rights" (Direcció de Serveis de Formació i la Gerència de Serveis de Cultura de la Diputació de Barcelona, 2022). One of the initiatives has been the creation of the Rome Charter on the Right to Participate Freely and Fully in Cultural Life in 2020, promoted by the worldwide organization United Cities and Local Governments. The city of Barcelona is a member of this organization. From the educational sphere, but with an express recognition of the principle of access to culture, it is also worth highlighting the Educating Cities Charter of 2022, promoted by the International Association of Educating Cities, which includes nearly five hundred cities from thirty-five different countries, including Barcelona (UCLG, 2020:11). These instruments do not have normative value, but they are nevertheless commitments adopted by local councils that usually guide their policies.

The Barcelona City Council has treated the cultural sector as strategic. Under the protection of chapter thirteen of the Barcelona Municipal Charter on culture, the city council has led a cultural policy to transform the city economically, culturally, socially, and to achieve urban regeneration objectives. It was a pioneer, approving the first strategic plan for the cultural sector in Spain in 1999, and over

the years, it has shaped what many studies call the Barcelona Model (Rius-Ulldemolins & Gisbert, 2018:108).

The Barcelona Cultural Rights Plan is structured around five vectors: access, creation, cultural practices, community and governance. They are linked to existing civil, political, economic, social, and environmental rights with the aim of paving the way for formal recognition of cultural rights. Measure number four corresponds to the field of culture and education, which will be analysed next (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021:20-22).

Prior to the approval of the Cultural Rights Plan, in 2019, the city council implemented a government measure to develop a cross-cutting public policy in Barcelona regarding culture and education, addressing the following problems: 1st an uneven distribution of cultural and artistic education offerings across the territory, conditioned by family income levels and not covering all ages equally, 2nd the systemic fracture between the cultural and educational systems and 3rd the lack of foresight in the system regarding the capacities of individuals and communities as culturally active agents (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019:12-17). We can affirm that some of these shortcomings are still present today.

The offering of artistic education aims to be increased and improved through the expansion of the City's Network of Municipal Music and Art Schools with the incorporation of a new centre in the Sant Martí district and with the relocation of the Sant Andreu Municipal Music School to the Fabra i Coats creation complex (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022:23-24). However, regarding municipal music schools, the framework collaboration agreement between the Department of Education of the Government of Catalonia, the Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Education, from 1995 already envisioned the objective of progressively achieving the existence of one music school per municipal district. Currently, only five of the ten districts that make up the city of Barcelona have these centres (Departament d'Ensenyament de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Ajuntament de Barcelona i IMEB, 1995:1-9).

The Barcelona Cultural Rights Plan also foresees that the Network of Municipal Music and Art Schools will develop more programs with a community and territorial deployment focus, and the continuation of the bonus program in these centres for low-income families. The other actions in the measure do not have direct effects on the Network of Municipal Music and Art Schools; they are focused on other facilities or educational centres from this vision that links education with culture.

Conclusions

- I. The rights to cultural access and participation are founded on international norms such as Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 15.2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We can appreciate the transversal reach of these rights into the educational sphere in the Fribourg Declaration and the Reports of the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights of the United Nations. Besides, these documents emphasize the importance of preserving and creating spaces where citizens can learn to develop their creativity. The rights to cultural access and participation should not only be considered in cultural legislation or through initiatives promoted by cultural departments. A transversal application and vision of these rights is necessary.
- II. In Spain music schools are part of the education system, and their creation is therefore protected by Article 27.5 of the Spanish Constitution. However, because they fall within the framework of special education (Art. 3.6 of LOMLOE), the universality and free access to these teachings are not constitutionally recognized (Art. 27.4 of the Spanish Constitution). Economic aid aimed at reducing the fees for elementary music education taught in public music schools can only come from local authorities, which, moreover, cover almost the entire cost of the service. The other main source of funding is the public fee paid by users. Therefore, it is very costly for local authorities to bear the burden of financial aid for access to these centres, especially for small municipalities.
- III. It is evident there is a systemic fracture between the cultural and educational systems, and a departmental conception of cultural access and participation rights. For this reason, a law on cultural rights could lead to the transversality of cultural access and participation rights across all areas of public policy action. In my opinion, Navarre's Foral Law 1/2019, of January 15, on Cultural Rights, doesn't resolve this issue because it doesn't foresee a special collaboration regime between administrative departments. Future cultural rights law will need to address how to overcome this separation.
- IV. The common principles for all public services are continuity, equality and constant adaptation. A genuine consolidation of public music schools as a public service, considering the principle of equality, would be a mechanism to guarantee access to these centres. We start from the premise that education is a public service due to what is established in Article 27 of the Constitution, and because educational services constitute an activity aimed at guaranteeing citizens' rights and ensuring the satisfaction of collective needs, with the idea of general interest. Consequently, since the objectives of music schools meet these stated premises and are also integrated into the educational system, they are a public service.

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The Dichotomy of Travel Courses in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The growth of international education has sparked a dichotomy in the delivery of travel courses, contrasting traditional in-person experiences with online and hybrid models. The demand for studying abroad continues to surge, fueled by students' aspirations for cultural immersion, global competencies, and enhanced employability. At the same time, technological advancements enable experiences that simulate international experiences with increasing realism. While in-person travel courses offer opportunities for direct cultural engagement and hands-on learning, they raise economic, accessibility and environmental concerns.

This paper focuses on a case study of a travel course from the Master in Science in Arts Administration program at Boston University, which transitioned to a hybrid format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This transition created an opportunity to compare the outcomes of the hybrid version with the traditional in-person model. The paper examines the educational, experiential, and professional impacts of both formats, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each.

Keywords:

Global Education

Hybrid Pedagogy

Experiential

Student-centered

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Dean Tanya Zlateva and Associate Dean Lou Chitkushev from Boston University Metropolitan College, Dr. Doug DeNatale and Sameera Palkar from the BU MET Graduate Program in Arts Administration, Neus Codina and Kate Dunkerley from MET International, Zhuyuan Zhang and staff from the MET Finance Office, BU Global Programs, Cassie Pearson, Amor Díaz-Campos, Blair Campbell, and our many students, participants, and organizational partners that participate in the Arts in Barcelona course.

Introduction

The landscape of international education is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by a surge in student demand for global competencies and the disruptive yet enabling force of technological advancements. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible learning modalities, revealing an inherent need for pedagogical resilience and innovation within higher education.

Through a case study of a course in the Master in Science in Arts Administration program at Boston University, we explore the evolving dynamics of international travel courses. The inquiry contrasts traditional in-person experiences with the growing prevalence of online and hybrid delivery models, highlighting the emerging tensions and opportunities in the design of globally engaged learning.

A Snapshot of International Education: Global Growth and Evolving Student Mobility Trends

The global educational sphere is experiencing an unprecedented period of growth and transformation. International education, once primarily characterized by a unidirectional flow of students from developing to developed nations, is now a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. This evolution is shaped by higher student expectations, rapid technological advancements, and an increasing awareness of global challenges, including environmental sustainability.

International student mobility has witnessed remarkable expansion over the past decades. In 2017, over 5 million students pursued degree programs outside their home countries. According to the 2024 World Immigration Report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM):

The number of internationally mobile students globally has significantly increased over the last two decades, as highlighted by data collected by UNESCO. In 2001, this number was at just over 2.2 million. A decade later, the number of internationally mobile students had grown to more than 3.8 million. This number continued to increase in the following years, rising to over 6 million in 2021, nearly triple the figure 20 years prior (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024).

1. Leading Destination Countries

In 2021 almost 6.5 million of international students were globally hosted. The geographic distribution of international students reveals both enduring concentrations and emerging shifts in preferences with top 5 countries being USA (833,204), United Kingdom (600,589), Australia (378,439), Germany (376,359) and the Russian Federation (321,845) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2024).

2. Leading Origin Countries

The top five countries, serving as the largest countries sending students globally in 2021 were China (1,021,303), India (508,174), Vietnam (137,022), Germany (126,359) and Uzbekistan (109,945) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2024).

China and India's leading positions as the top countries of origin for international students are largely attributable to their substantial youth populations, the rapid expansion of their middle classes, and a strong cultural emphasis on accessing high-quality global education. However, a critical nuance arises from recent trends: both nations are concurrently investing heavily in the expansion and enhancement of their domestic higher education sectors. This dual-track approach suggests that outbound student mobility from these countries may stabilize—or even decline gradually—in the coming years, as improved local capacity and quality encourage more students to pursue education at home.

In-person vs. Online and Hybrid Travel Courses

Individuals are increasingly motivated to pursue international education for a variety of reasons, including the desire for access to globally recognized qualifications, academic collaboration opportunities, enhanced employability, personal growth, and the appeal of cultural exchange and adventure.

The COVID-19 period of disruption made it essential to re-evaluate internationalization goals within higher education, moving beyond the sole focus on physical student movement. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, accelerating an already ongoing movement toward digital integration in education. The underlying systemic pressures, such as rising costs of traditional study abroad, the imperative for wider accessibility, and growing environmental concerns,²⁶⁷ were already pushing the educational sector towards these flexible formats, which are now core elements of long-term institutional strategy

²⁶⁷ According to the QS International Student Survey, 62% of international students said environmental sustainability was “very” or “extremely” important to them: <https://www.qs.com/insights/articles/decarbonising-mobility-in-the-international-education-sector/>

rather than temporary solutions. The sudden transition from conventional in-person teaching to hybrid or online learning highlighted the capability of digital technologies to support education even in the face of extraordinary challenges.²⁶⁸

Online and hybrid programs offer substantial advantages in terms of accessibility by removing geographic, financial, and/or visa-related barriers that could limit participation in traditional study abroad programs. This expanded access democratizes international education, making it available to a broader and more diverse student population who might otherwise be unable to afford or pursue such opportunities. Furthermore, their flexibility enables students to balance studies with work, or family responsibilities, supporting diverse learning styles and autonomy.

Nevertheless, traditional in-person study abroad experiences continue to offer irreplaceable benefits. The depth of cultural immersion, hands-on learning opportunities, and richer professional networking fostered by face-to-face engagement remain key strengths. Thus, the future of international education will likely involve a hybrid landscape that integrates the best elements of both digital and in-person experiences.

Case Study: The Arts in Barcelona Travel Course

Barcelona in Boston

This section contextualizes perspectives on international education in relation to an international travel course, The Arts in Barcelona, part of the Master of Science in Arts Administration program at Boston University. Due to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, we transitioned the course into a hybrid format,²⁶⁹ *Barcelona in Boston*—a globally-oriented arts and cultural management course *without* the trip to Barcelona. What we developed in 2022 was relevant when we reintroduced the travel version of the course in subsequent years. We did not abandon the hybrid aspects of the COVID-era class. However, we did step back from the virtual-first approach, which allowed us to reconnect with the learning goals of the course and the needs of the students and draw

²⁶⁸ Boston University's "Learn from Anywhere" model, which outfitted classrooms with the technology and staff support to offer most of its courses in a true hybrid fashion exemplifies how institutions have responded to global disruptions by embracing innovative pedagogical frameworks. See <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2020/remote-in-person-hybrid-teaching-undergraduate-programs/>.

BU's Metropolitan College has been offering online programs since 2002. See <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/wendy-colby-bu-virtual-will-chart-online-learning-future/>.

²⁶⁹ We use hybrid for efficiency and to differentiate the 2022 pandemic course from subsequent courses, although the Arts in Barcelona 2022 course was neither strictly hybrid nor strictly blended.

from the different, yet specific strengths of each pedagogical model.²⁷⁰ In this paper, we consider the educational, experiential, interpersonal, and potential professional impacts of both formats. Our approach, informed by theories of experiential and student-centered learning, looping, and best practices for global education,²⁷¹ was developed through ongoing instructor conversations, reflection, observations of student work and engagement, and student reflections.

1. Global Education, Experiential Learning, and Student-centered Learning

The opportunity (and necessity) of shifting the course format during COVID caused us to examine our motivations for requiring the course, versus simply letting students waive it and take another one in its place. We felt strongly about the importance and value of global education for its “interdisciplinary approach” which focuses on “human rights, democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue” (*Global Education Guidelines: Concepts and Methodologies on Global Education for Educators and Policy Makers*, 2019: 17).

While we enthusiastically embraced the “Barcelona in Boston” moniker, the task was not as straightforward as simply “translating” the course into a campus-based experience. We wanted to embed the embodied, sensorial, and community aspects of an in-person international travel program into the campus-based experience. This forced us to address important foundational questions: What were the goals of the course? What did we want for the students? What were the best tools and techniques to get them there? To that end, we grounded the course in principles of experiential and student-centered learning first and foremost and designed the activities and technological components in response.

The course reflected both hybrid and blended models. Most students were in person for much of the course (the Friday evening classes and the week intensive) but did asynchronous learning through Blackboard readings, discussion posts, and independent research. Instructors, facilitators, and presenters joined us both in person and online.

²⁷⁰ Lauren O’Neal is a faculty member at Boston University’s Graduate Program in Arts Administration and has taught the Arts in Barcelona class for three years. Alumna Raquel Peula (class of 2014), based in Barcelona, served as program coordinator and on-site facilitator.

²⁷¹ Our pedagogical choices were guided by a variety of conversations on the importance of global education, including those within the *Global Education Guidelines: Concepts and Methodologies on Global Education for Educators and Policy Makers* report by the North-South Centre of Council of Europe, in consultation with the Global Education Network, Lisbon: Portugal, 2019.

Experiential education, also called learning by doing, inspired by John Dewey and organized into a curricular framework by David Kolb in the 1970s (Miettinen, 2000: 54)²⁷² has many positive impacts, including increased learning, supporting students' application of classroom knowledge to real life settings, improving students' communication skills, and facilitating cooperation and teamwork (Bradberry and De Maio, 2018: 2).

Our approach included hosting speakers from both US and Spanish organizations, providing Boston-based resources on Spanish arts and culture, integrating first-hand experiences of Spanish culture, including flamenco lessons and a Catalanian cooking demonstration, and encouraging other student-initiated activities.²⁷³

In this way, the course redesign was equally led by a commitment to student-centered learning, where students take an active role in their education. The pedagogy links students' individual experiences and knowledge to course content and transforms the learner (and the content) in the process. Student-centered learning is a critical aspect of successful global education, as it "stimulates self-consciousness about the learner's responsibility as an agent of change within its political, economic, social and cultural environment, and makes the learner (...) aware of the impact and the interconnectedness between its local actions and global challenges (*Global Education Guidelines*, 2019: 19).

"Culture" went beyond museums and theaters. It signified everything that contributed to or functioned as culture, including film, publishing, and labor practices. In this manner, the course emphasized real-world interdisciplinarity, which enabled students "to become global citizens who interpret the world through multiple lenses" (Prestholdt and Fletcher, 2018: 17). This framework encouraged students to think expansively about arts administration research. They identified topics both relevant to the broader cultural ecosystem and personally important to them. The resulting projects were diverse and thoughtful, and included topics such as sustainable fashion and dance music within the clubbing scene.

2. Looping and Building Relationships

²⁷² The literature on experiential learning is extensive and our goal is not to review this body of research, but to mention it as one of our operating pedagogical frameworks.

²⁷³ Offered by Deborah Hansen, chef and founder of the Boston-based Spanish restaurant Taberna de Haro, in collaboration with MET College's Food, Wine, and Gastronomy program.

We also drew on the pedagogical strategy of looping, modified to fit our context. Looping, most often employed in secondary education settings, is when one teacher stays with a cohort of students for several years. Looping “increases teacher knowledge about their learners’ intellectual strengths and weaknesses (...) [and] gives teachers more opportunities to build on prior knowledge, which leads to increased learning (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), 2018: 2).”

The research on looping points to benefits including increased time for teaching, better attendance, and even a reduction of staff absences. Looping can also lead to improved relationships between students and between students and teachers (Comer, 2024: 26). As the Boston University faculty of record, Lauren was already present for the entire class. Having Raquel attend every class session effectively moved her from the role of facilitator and program coordinator to one of a co-instructor. We saw first-hand the positive impact of this decision: Raquel was able to get to know the students, make useful observations, and facilitate discussions that strengthened the connections between the course content, the students, and the presenters. Looping became one of the pedagogical strategies we kept when the in-person travel courses resumed.

3. Student Impact and Implications of Barcelona in Boston

Students were generally pleased with the course, which received an overall score of 4.43 (out of five).²⁷⁴ The course structure and content did facilitate some level of global awareness. From a practical standpoint, it also fulfilled the degree requirements for students on the verge of graduating. Our focus on experiential and student-centered learning also resulted in a more dynamic, participatory class, and contributed to students’ thoughtful and nuanced researched presentations. Students appreciated these efforts, noting, “It’s amazing how much innovation was done for us in the limited conditions and how much effort was made to give us a touch of Spanish culture.”

If anything, the course *increased* students’ desire to visit Barcelona. Student comments to this end included “Despite not being able to travel to Barcelona, the guest speakers were highly informative!” and “Engaging even though we were not able to travel”.

²⁷⁴ All data/quotations in this section are from the Boston University Metropolitan College AR 587 The Arts in Barcelona Course, Spring 2022.

Despite the positive outcomes, we felt the need for more immersive, authentic, and connected experience was apparent.²⁷⁵ The final class consensus was captured in this comment: “We hope that next year’s students will be able to travel to Barcelona”.

Barcelona Revisited: Return of the Travel Component

In 2023 and 2024, we returned to the course as originally conceived, with the on campus, in-person meetings and the travel component to Barcelona over the university spring break. We kept many of the pedagogical strategies from 2022, which helped us shape the travel-oriented courses in critical ways.

1. Re-engagement and Intentionality with Pedagogical Strategies

First, we reaffirmed and expanded our engagement with the goals of global education. Since we would be physically on site in Barcelona for eight days as a group, we needed to communicate goals and expectations about international exchange in a more direct way and convey the importance and potential of global education. This included building more “academic” knowledge of Spanish and Catalonia history, and past and current cultural policy, as well as socio-emotional cultural knowledge, such as customs, behaviors, and standards for professional conduct.

Along with the knowledge about the discipline of arts and cultural management, we were more intentional about helping students to develop transversal skills, those relevant in other circumstances including future professional settings.²⁷⁶ The *Global Education Guidelines* argue that global education is transformative, involving a “deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is an education for the mind as well as for the heart. This implies a radical change towards interconnectedness and a real sense of the possibilities and opportunities for creating equality, social

²⁷⁵ This relates to the nature of how the class was developed in the first place: it came less out of a desire to innovate and more to address an urgent, practical problem. While we were able to center experiential learning in some ways, we did not have time or capacity to explore, develop, or integrate tools such as virtual reality or augmented reality. While these technologies would have undoubtedly added an engaging layer to the class, we are still not convinced that they could fully replace in-person travel experiences, at least for now. This is an area for future study and experimentation.

²⁷⁶ Transversal skills include critical and innovative thinking, inter- and intra-personal skills, demonstration of global citizenship, and media and information literacy. See “Skills for Holistic Human Development” in *Education Policy Brief*, UNESCO Asia-Pacific, v. 2, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245064/PDF/245064eng.pdf.multi>.

justice, understanding and cooperation amongst nations and peoples” (2019: 19). Importantly, to become authentically and respectfully part of this global community, students had to develop their own *self*-knowledge, including capacity for uncertainty, tolerance for different viewpoints, emotional fortitude and maturity, willingness to step into a leadership role, peer support, and conflict resolution skills.²⁷⁷

We recommitted to our core strategy of experiential education and student-centered learning and used those as guiding pillars throughout the course planning and our work with collaborators both at home and in Barcelona.²⁷⁸ Before, travel courses had been assumed to be “naturally” experiential, without much thought about why, how, or the impact of that approach. However, as Leigh A. Bradberry and Jennifer De Maio remark,

Experience *alone* does not necessarily mean that students in an experiential program will learn; reflection on the experience is critical to learning, and a committed faculty member must work to facilitate that reflection so that experiences are translated into something meaningful (2018: 14-15).

To support student learning, we integrated expanded reflection activities including numerous additional class and small group meetings during and after the travel week, enlisted students to contribute to a course travel blog, and had students complete a final survey at the end of the experience.

The strength of a student-focused pedagogy was evident in the depth and sophistication of the students’ discussion posts, as well as in their approaches to research. A Google “culinary tour” map developed by one of the presenters inspired a student to develop her own Google map for Barcelona public art, which was reinforced by an optional public art tour on our arrival. Still other students developed cross-cultural comparisons of philanthropy practices, investigated the role of religion in visual representation, and researched arts entrepreneurship in migrant communities.

²⁷⁷ Many of these are characteristics of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, *Global Education Guidelines* details in its section on p. 40.

²⁷⁸ Our course partners included BU’s Global Studies program, MET International, and the Food, Wine & Gastronomy program. The focus on student-centered learning extended to the teaching assistants, who helped develop and led some course activities.

We continued to use looping as a pedagogical strategy. Presenters worked with students virtually during on-campus class sessions. Later, in Barcelona, presenters expanded upon the conversation with increased efficacy and ease. The prior relationship helped build connection and confidence.²⁷⁹

2. Student Impact and Implications of the 2023 and 2024 Travel Courses

What did the official Boston University course evaluation data tell us? The evaluations for 2023 and 2024 revealed a slight increase in score (4.70 and 4.50, respectively).²⁸⁰ In the written comments, students indicated wanting to spend more time discussing peers' research and noted the usefulness of the readings and on-campus activities. There was enthusiastic support for adding a final class meeting after the trip for additional reflection and celebration. We also designed a separate self-reflection course survey for students to assess their experience (including their own learning), identify the areas of personal and professional growth, and reflect on the importance of global exchange within the field of arts administration. Both assessment measures taken together revealed important insights about the student experience and the impact of the course.

Several themes became apparent within the self-reflections, including an appreciation for the depth and breadth of the course materials and activities (both online and in-person),²⁸¹ an awareness of how students' skills and professional capacities were enhanced, and an increased understanding of international artistic and organizational models.

Based on the responses from 33 students (100% of the participants) three primary themes emerged with noticeable frequency: social bonding, academic/professional learning, and personal growth. The theme of positive social bonding and community was the most prevalent. The opening dinner, in particular, was mentioned at least 15 times, consistently described as a key moment that catalyzed group cohesion.

The development of friendships and peer relationships also appeared prominently, with eight distinct comments referencing the value of connecting with classmates from diverse backgrounds. Many

²⁷⁹ While we did not formally evaluate this aspect of our pedagogy, it did seem to result in students being more engaged on site.

²⁸⁰ Boston University Metropolitan Course Evaluations AR5887 The Arts in Barcelona, Spring 2023 and Spring 2024.

²⁸¹ By this point in time, technologies such as Zoom, learning management systems, customized Google maps, and even drones, which one student used to make a fantastic summary video of the travel week, are so well-integrated (if not seamless), that they are generally unremarkable unless there is a major technical problem.

students admired their peers' courage and adaptability, often framing these relationships as inspiring and even life changing. Additionally, interactions with local presenters and community members were noted in seven reflections, highlighting the appreciation for genuine, thoughtful conversations with people outside the cohort, and the sense of shared humanity that these interactions cultivated.

A second major theme was the emphasis on academic and professional learning through connection, noted in at least 15 reflections. These comments focused on cross-cultural comparisons in arts management, with students drawing contrasts between collaborative, community-based approaches in Barcelona and those in their home countries, particularly the U.S.

In terms of personal growth and self-discovery, students expressed how the experience reshaped their perspectives, broadened their sense of possibility, or reawakened passions. At least six comments mentioned this kind of transformation, whether through exposure to new cultural contexts or the rediscovery of artistic or academic interests. One student notably highlighted how the trip revealed the deeper, non-academic value of graduate education—particularly in the realm of human relationships—a point that resonates across many other responses.

In summary, the survey data show a consistent and overwhelmingly positive sentiment regarding the social and emotional connections forged among students and with Barcelona arts and cultural representatives, as well as the academic and professional insights gained through direct engagement and cross-cultural comparisons. These aspects were frequently cited as the most impactful and transformative elements of the experience, contributing significantly to students' personal and professional development.

Conclusion: Opportunities for Consideration and Innovation

In today's era marked by rapid change and global uncertainty, it is essential to re-evaluate the goals of internationalization in higher education, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on the physical movement of students. Instead, institutions must embrace a broader vision that centers on cross-cultural learning, collaborative research, and measurable global learning outcomes. Such a redefinition allows for a more inclusive and flexible approach to international education that is less dependent on geographic mobility and more attuned to the complex realities of a globally connected world.

At the same time, we cannot overlook the social and environmental implications for global mobility, such as overtourism and the environmental impact of travel.²⁸² Institutions must take concrete steps to prepare students to be respectful, culturally aware and responsible visitors, and to reduce the substantial carbon footprint associated with international student travel. This involves integrating travel-related emissions into institutional carbon accounting, actively pursuing offsetting strategies, and promoting low-impact travel alternatives. Equally important is equipping students—our future leaders—with the knowledge, tools, and values necessary to make informed, sustainable decisions.²⁸³

The future of international education is no longer defined by a simple choice between in-person and online modalities. Rather, it lies in the thoughtful integration of both. Strategic use of technology, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and AI-driven personalized systems, can make online learning more interactive, engaging, and realistic, enriching students' educational experiences in meaningful ways.²⁸⁴

Either way, while digital tools offer expanded access and enhanced capabilities, a human-centric approach remains crucial in this evolving landscape. Technology must be used to complement, rather than replace, authentic interpersonal interactions. Students require a strong sense of belonging, and this is nurtured through meaningful interactions with faculty and peers. Personalized attention and a sustained sense of community are essential to fostering student engagement and well-being. Ultimately, human connections continue to be at the heart of transformative international learning experiences.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies:

²⁸² See <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/barcelona-reckons-with-overtourism-summer-2025/index.html> and <https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/barcelona-slashes-cruise-infrastructure-to-five-terminals-as-spain-cracks-down-on-overtourism-and-maritime-emissions/>.

²⁸³ There is no easy answer here. In the 2023 and 2024 courses, we explored Barcelona primarily through walking and public transportation, but we were not explicit about *why* we were exploring the city this way. This is something we can connect to ecological reasons more directly in the future.

²⁸⁴ Some research argues that there are *still* some aspects of learning and development that are more effective in person, including cognitive development, affective awareness, and facility with cultural diversity. See Roy Campos Retana, "Hybrid vs. in-person learning: The displacement of boundaries in customized executive programs," <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.101064>. As technology develops, it is likely that even these characteristics will soon be able to be reproduced through digital means.

While preparing this work, the authors used generative AI for research and narrative clarity. The authors reviewed the materials and take responsibility for the publication's content.

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THE FUTURE IS CULTURAL: POLICY, PRACTICE, AND EDUCATION: INDIGENOUS WISDOM AND PEACE IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Southwestern region of Nigeria is occupied by the Yoruba people, who refer to their land as "Ile ogbon ati oye." They believe Yorubaland is deeply rooted in deep wisdom that manifests various dimensions. The most popular among these divisions are Ifa divination, political understanding, local medicine, and a lot more. Despite the imperfections, the Yoruba people have maintained a level of peace that cannot be compared to the debate of peace in the country of Nigeria. The most popular belief among the Yoruba people is that "ogbon ju agbara lo" (wisdom is more substantial than strength). This reflects their philosophical approach to peace and conflict; despite the fact that their military and political power is not as strong as that of some other ethnic groups, they have maintained peace for several years. The purpose of this research paper is to shed light on the concept of 'indigenous wisdom among the people of Southwestern Nigeria,' focusing on their cultures, traditions, and practices. More importantly, the paper will analyse the factors contributing to peace in the region as well as the challenges they face, despite their claimed wisdom in Ifa.

Keywords:

Indigenous
wisdom, Yoruba
culture,
Peacebuilding,
Traditions, Conflict
resolution

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous wisdom is deeply rooted in the traditions and cultures of the Yoruba people of South-Western Nigeria. Which is passed down through generations by their ancestors. The Yoruba people are intensively wise, with a standing belief in consulting the Ifá oracle before putting any decision into consideration. With the introduction of Christianity and Islam to South-Western region of Nigeria, traditional practices has started declining. Notwithstanding the Yoruba people still hold strong belief in their ancestors to have made provisions to safeguard the land, ensuring its protection long before the current generation came into existence, It also necessary to note that some of these protective measures, that were intended to safeguard the land, are now causing problems and harm to the current generation, due to shift in beliefs and also deviation from traditional practices.

If Nigeria as a state should be analyzed, the country finds itself in a state neither of war nor peace. The relentless violence in the north, the increasing threat of piracy in the South-South, and the ongoing challenges in the Southwest, including kidnappings and the continuous harassment of farmers by criminals masquerading as Fulani herdsmen, all contribute to the instability. The people of the Southwest are peaceful, they also place great value on maintaining tranquillity. Regardless of various provocations that could have led them to resort to war, the Yoruba people have continuously chosen to avoid war, considering the implications for those regions not yet affected by the escalating crisis.

Recently, some individuals of Fulani descent have been testing the patients of the Yorubas, haven concluded that they are people who would rush into wars without considering the costs.²⁸⁵ During the Nigeria's civil war, it was Yoruba figures such as Olusegun Obasanjo, Benjamin Adekunle, Alani Akinrinade, and Alabi Isama who emerged as key heroes. Whereas, some northern commanders, lacking a coherent strategy, met their end in the rivers, blindly following the orders of leaders without an adequate plan.

If the Yoruba people were careless in their approach to war, the recent incident in Ondo State would likely have excavate a long-term war, which might have indirectly resolved in their favour.²⁸⁶ Yorubas would have been forced to account for the deaths of the late Mrs. Funke Olakunrin, the Olufon of Ifon, also the Deputy Registrar of FUTA at the hands of herdsmen.

The patience of the people of the Southwest Nigeria does not mean they are weak; it shows their intense traditional wisdom that has long guided them, which has been protecting them from crisis and

²⁸⁵ G. Odumakin, The Wars Yoruba Fight, Vanguard News, 6th February, 2021. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/02/the-wars-yoruba-fight/>

²⁸⁶ G. Odumakin, The Wars Yoruba Fight, Vanguard News, 6th February, 2021. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/02/the-wars-yoruba-fight/>

making them to emerge victorious in several wars despite limited military capabilities. Legends such as Aare Ona Kankanfo, Balogun Ogunmola, Ogedengbe Agbogun Gboro of Ijesa land and Afonja are examples of great military leaders who were not just brave but also spiritually fortified, their lives are shaped by strong belief in traditional powers and the rituals that strengthens them.

To the Yorubas, the most accountable weapon in any war is wisdom and confidence. Although they are powerful warriors, the Yorubas prioritise peace over war. This has exceptionally contributed to making the region the most peaceful among the three major geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

The target of this research paper is to analyze how indigenous wisdom contributes to peace and conflict resolution in Southwest Nigeria. It will also explore the role of cultural practices, traditional beliefs, and leadership structures in promoting harmony and social stability in the region. The study will assess the relevance of these indigenous practices in contemporary governance and their impact on community resilience. While analysing historical and modern examples, the research will highlight how indigenous methods of conflict resolution can complement or inform current approaches to peace and security in Southwest Nigeria.

STUDY AREA

States in the Southwest Nigeria include Osun, Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, and Ondo states, it is a region marked by its cultural richness, economic significance, and political influence. The region comprises of people whose language, traditions and festivals defines them. Lagos stands as Nigeria's commercial and financial zone, while agriculture, particularly cocoa production, remains a key economic driver in other areas. In terms of politics southwest region has produced influential figures and continues to shape national debates around governance and regional autonomy. Urbanization, especially in Lagos, has brought both opportunities that comes with its challenges, including overcrowding, traffic, and pollution.

The region also boasts some of Nigeria's highest literacy rate, the region also has some of the best educational institutions in Nigeria which includes the likes of the Ekiti State University, Federal University Oye Ekiti, University of Ilorin University of Ibadan and others. With the development, undeveloped communities faces healthcare problems and access to social amenities. Environmental challenges such as deforestation and flooding, most especially in coastal areas further draw back the hands of the development in the region.. Southwest Nigeria offers a mix of traditions and development which makes the region an important area to study when it comes to understanding the culture, politics and socio-economic development of a people or an environment.

THE CONCEPT INDEGENEOUS WISDOM

Philosophers of science and advocates of indigenous wisdom have engaged in discussions about how indigenous wisdom relates to science. Often referred to interchangeably as 'local knowledge' or 'ethnoscience,' indigenous wisdom is seen as culture-specific. Scholars in Science and Technology Studies argue that all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is context-dependent. Indigenous wisdom and knowledge represent a collection of traditions, practices, and insights passed down from generation to generations by diverse communities all over the world. Embedded in deep connections to the land, spirituality, and communal values, Indigenous wisdom offers a significant approach to human flourishing.²⁸⁷

It is undeniable that every human society has its own methods of acquiring and passing down knowledge from one generation to the next. Regardless of culture, religion, ethnicity, or race, every society possesses unique forms of knowledge that are specific to them. This is based on the fundamental reality that knowledge acquisition is often tied to the ways in which a society seeks to solve its distinct challenges.²⁸⁸ These holistic perspectives highlight harmony with nature, sustainability, and a profound understanding of interconnection. Indigenous wisdom systems often prioritise collective well-being over individual success, nurturing a sense of community and shared responsibility. The wisdom embedded in these traditions promotes respect for cultural diversity, resilience in the face of adversity, and a close relationship with the environment.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE YORUBA NATION

The Yoruba history is a very interesting one, one of the reasons why several euro-centric writers have come to a conclusion that the history might not be a true one. However, afrocentric writers will never let them have their ways, one way or the other, the story line of the yoruba history goes in line with the religious creation story, both the bible and the quran attest to it that the earth was filled with water before life actually started, and the *Olodumare* was the master of the universe, the mastermind of creation.

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of

²⁸⁷ W. Hoffman, Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom - Pathways to Human Flourishing, Public Event, 25/03/24.

²⁸⁸ J. O. Ejikemeuwa, The African Indegeneous Knowledge, Problems and Perspectives, A publication of The Association for the Promotion of African Studies, 2020.

*the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."*²⁸⁹

*"Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the Earth were meshed together then We ripped them apart? And then We made of water everything living? Would they still not believe?"*²⁹⁰

Yorubaland is the cultural homeland of the Yoruba people in West Africa, spanning modern-day Nigeria, Togo, and Benin. Its ancient history is primarily conveyed through oral traditions and legends.²⁹¹ According to Yoruba belief, Olodumare, the Supreme God, instructed Obatala to create the earth. However, on his journey, Obatala drank palm wine and became intoxicated. As a result, his younger brother, Oduduwa, took over the task. He descended from the heavens on a chain, cast a handful of earth onto the primordial ocean, and placed a cockerel on it, causing the earth to spread and form land, where Ile-Ife would eventually be established. Oduduwa, credited with creating the world, is considered the ancestor of the first divine king of the Yoruba, while Obatala is said to have molded the first Yoruba people from clay. The word "ife" in Yoruba means "expansion," so "Ile-Ife" signifies "The Land of Expansion," in reference to the origin myth.

Yoruba people live mostly in South-West Nigeria.²⁹² They have developed a variety of different artistic forms including pottery, weaving, beadwork, metalwork, and mask making. Most of the artworks were made to honour the gods and ancestors and since there are more than 401 known gods to the Yoruba there is much sculpture and artwork made. Yoruba people are a large ethno-linguistic group or ethnic nation in Africa, and the majority of them speak the Yoruba language. The Yoruba constitute approximately 35 percent of Nigeria's total population, and around 40 million individuals throughout the region of West Africa. While the majority of the Yoruba live in western Nigeria, there are also substantial indigenous Yoruba communities in Benin, Ghana, Togo and the Caribbean.

A significant percentage of Africans enslaved during the TransAtlantic Slave Trade in the Americas managed to maintain the Yoruba spiritual religion known as Aborisha. Indeed, the initiation and

²⁸⁹ Genesis 1 verse 2, according to NIV Bible.

²⁹⁰ Quran 21.30

²⁹¹ Boundless World History, Yoruba State, Africa Civilization, Lumen Candela, retrieved Nov 24, 2024, Available at: <https://www.boundless.com/world-history/textbooks/boundless-world-history-textbook/>. License: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

²⁹² Come To Nigeria, The Yoruba People, 2024, Retrieved on 25th November, 2024. Available at: <https://www.cometonigeria.com/about-nigeria/nigerian-people-culture/yoruba-people/>

practice of Aborisha spiritual religion offers a route to all people of African descent, who were victims of slave trade in the Americas or the Caribbean, to make claim to Yoruba heritage. The Yorubas are the main ethnic group in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo, which are subdivisions of Nigeria; they also constitute a sizable proportion of Kwara and Kogi States as well as Edo State.

YORUBA INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

The Yoruba is a popular ethnic group in West Africa, and in the world. It contains rich and several types of sweet indigenous traditions, cultures, and belief structure. Despite the fact that the Yoruba are not united politically, their cultural heritage, practices, and historical narratives show a remarkable unity across the African continent and even in their traces among other cultures beyond the African continent. Among the most significant cultural elements within Yoruba society is the institution of the *Oba*, a traditional ruler, who is the central figure in their governance and the spiritual life of the Yoruba environment. The selection of an *Oba* is usually carried out by a prescribed set of individuals guided by principles, intensively overseen by elders who the Yorubas refer to as the *Afobaje*. This group is entrusted with the responsibility of electing the *Oba*, ensuring that the process is rooted in tradition, consensus, and the wisdom of the community.

The Yorubas are known for their vibrant festivals, which serve as evidence of their history, spirituality, and social organization. These festivals, including the Egungun Festival, Ogun Festival, Oya Festival, Sango Festival, and the New Yam Festival, are central to Yoruba culture and also mark important occasions in their religious calendar. These events not only celebrate their deities and ancestral spirits but also reinforce community bonds, as they are often accompanied by ritual performances, dances, and communal feasts.

In the past, the Yoruba community was made up of religious groups who worshiped different gods. Even though, according to Yoruba Tradition, these Orisas are considered to be administrative gods, serving the purposes of Olodumare, the highest god in the Yoruba belief system. The custom depicts that the Yoruba community understands Olodumare to be exalted and beyond the reach of mortals, which is why they call upon the Orisas whom they trust are able to overcome the barrier which Olodumare has set forth. The Orisas are regarded as mediators in that when the previous words are mentioned, the Yoruba people offer their prayers and ask for help through them, assuring that their needs will be met more quickly.

The Yoruba people hold a strong belief in *ogbon*, which they regard as deep, intensive knowledge.²⁹³ They believe that *Olodumare*, the supreme deity is the *arinu rode* a divine ability to see both the external and internal aspects of a person. This divine insight emphasizes that as humans, we cannot possess full knowledge or always make the right decisions. Because of this the Yoruba people mostly turn to *Orunmila*, the deity they belief is the closest to Olodumare, for guidance. Orunmila is considered the embodiment of wisdom and insight, and is affectionately referred to as the *Baba Ifa* /i.e the father of the Ifa oracle.

In Yoruba culture, Ifa divinatory system plays a crucial and indispensable role. All decisions, both personal or communal can be taken into consideration without first consulting Ifa. This practice of seeking Ifa's guidance is captured in the Yoruba expression "eje kan da Ifa si," which translates to "we must consult Ifa." It shows the importance of ensuring certainty and clarity before embarking on any course of action.

For the Yoruba people, wisdom and careful decision-making are paramount. This is why they do not make major life decisions be it in relationships, business, or matters of conflict without first seeking the guidance of the Ifa oracle. The Ifa system is so integral to Yoruba life that, historically, no major military campaign was undertaken without consulting the oracle. Before going to war, the Yoruba people would ask Ifa whether victory was assured, or if they should refrain from battle. Should the oracle indicate that a sacrifice *Etutu* was needed to avert misfortune or ensure success, the Yoruba people would comply without hesitation, seeing such rituals as essential steps to avoid errors and mitigate risk.

Ifá is not just a system of divination; it is also an initiatory tradition, overseen by the spirit of *Orunmila*, who is believed to have imparted this sacred knowledge to humanity. The Ifa divinatory system is practiced by initiates called Babaláwo (male priests) or Bokónṣ(female priestesses). These spiritual leaders, having undergone rigorous training, serve as mediators between the physical and spiritual worlds, offering wisdom and guidance to those who seek it.

The Yoruba people's dependence on Ifa represents a true respect for the wisdom of the divine, a commitment to thoughtful decision-making, and an understanding that human knowledge is finite. They seek divine direction to navigate life's uncertainties and challenges, striving to live in harmony with the will of Olodumare.

INDIGENOUS WISDOM AMONG THE YORUBA PEOPLE

²⁹³ An Interview with Mr. Bolarinde Imole, A Trader, 57yrs Old, Alakia Isebo Street, Ibadan, Oyo State, 24th November, 2024.

Conflict is an unavoidable phase in life.²⁹⁴ However, the wisdom of the people of South West Nigeria has played a significant role in maintaining a peaceful environment in the region throughout history. A common question often arises: "Is the South West truly peaceful?" The answer is a resounding yes, this is because it is uncommon to find someone in the South West who wakes up having the fear in mind that there might be a threat of a bomb blast on their way to work. The most popular request of people in prayer is for a better life, prosperity, and protection from an accidents. Not until recently that kidnapping became a menace that has been eating deep into the fabric of the southwestern region of Nigeria. Kidnapping is a global issue as old as time itself, and it continues to grow both geographically and numerically across the world. Today, it has become a growing business due to the ransom demanded during the act, which most times, depend on the social status of the victim.²⁹⁵ What makes the situation even worse is that, unlike in the past when it primarily targeted those of higher social standing, kidnapping now affects people of all backgrounds and social statuses within a community. Several factors have been pinpointed as the driving forces behind this destructive force, which is determined to rot the economy and instill an unending fear in the people. What made the whole situation more worse, is the constant decline in the state's economy, and the toxic tribal political games played by selfish politicians who place their political interest over that of the people

When studying the depth of indigenous wisdom among the people of Southwestern Nigeria, it is necessary to examine the fundamental aspects that have contributed to maintaining a sense of peace and stability in the region to this day. Historically, this role was largely centred around the kings and religious leaders, including figures such as the Ifa priests, who guided the community with their knowledge and spiritual insight. These leaders played important roles in ensuring harmony within society, offering guidance not only in religious and cultural matters but also in resolving conflicts and ensuring unity. In contemporary times, the responsibility for upholding peace in Southwestern Nigeria has expanded to include a broader spectrum of leadership. This now encompasses political, religious, and traditional leaders, who each play a vital role in maintaining social cohesion. Political leaders are tasked with creating policies that promote stability, while religious leaders offer spiritual guidance and moral direction. Traditional leaders, drawing from the rich heritage of indigenous wisdom, continue to act as mediators and custodians of culture, reinforcing the values that have long served to unify the people. Together, these various forms of leadership work in tandem to uphold peace, ensuring that both modern challenges and traditional customs are balanced in the pursuit of a harmonious society.

²⁹⁴ I. N. Chibuzo, James' concept of wisdom (JAMES 3: 13-18): A Veritable Tool For Peace And Conflict Resolution In Nigeria?, November 10, Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345330352_JAMES'_CONCEPT_OF_WISDOM_JAMES_3_13-18_A_VERITABLE_TOOL_FOR_PEACE_AND_CONFLICT_RESOLUTION_IN_NIGERIA

²⁹⁵ F. Alo, Insecurity and Kidnapping in Southwest Nigeria: Humanitarian Concerns in the 21st Century, Corpus Intellectual ISSN PRINT 2811-3187 ONLINE 2811-3209 Volume 2 S.E. GENDER CONF. 2023 December 2023, pg 80.

In the history of the Yoruba people, the kings played a vital role in settling disputes within their communities, with the wisdom and knowledge passed down by their ancestors. These monarchs were not only arbiters of justice but also spiritual leaders, ensuring the wellbeing of their people through their understanding of traditional customs. It was common practice for the kings to perform essential sacrifices and rituals, aimed at securing a peaceful reign and promoting harmony within society. These ceremonies were usually focused on dispelling bad energies and also protecting the land from potential calamities, ensuring that the prosperity and stability of the kingdom were preserved. Through these actions, the kings fulfilled their dual role as both temporal and spiritual leaders, safeguarding the wellbeing of their people in both the physical and metaphysical realms.

The Yoruba peace treaty of September 23, 1886, is an important document of immeasurable significance that must not be overlooked.²⁹⁶ In the history of modern Yoruba, the peace accord of September 23, 1886, stands out as a monumental document, crafted with the intention of promoting harmony and solidarity across all regions of Yoruba land, as well as among the entire Yoruba people Africa's largest ethnic group and a leader in the continent's civilisation. This agreement addressed nearly every corner of Yoruba territory. The primary goal was to put an end to the burning conflict known as the *Ogun Kiriji* (Kiriji war), which had begun in 1878 between the Ibadan and Ekitiparapo factions. Over time, the war had escalated, involving a vast array of Yoruba states and territories. These included the Ooni of Ife's domain, the Modakeke community near Ile-Ife, the Alaafin of Oyo's realm, the Awujale of Ijebu's territory, as well as the kingdoms of Egba and Owu in Abeokuta, the Remo states, and the territories of Owo, Ondo, Ilorin, and the Okun Yoruba in the northeast. It also touched upon the kingdom of Lagos, the Ilaje and Ikale regions, and even the distant western Yoruba states of Ajase, Ketu, and Sabe, which are now part of Benin Republic. The 1886 agreement marked a pivotal moment, establishing a renewed spirit of peace, unity, trade, and mutual respect after nearly a century of devastating warfare that had pitted Yoruba communities against one another. It is a positive development that, today's generation of Yoruba people, have set aside September 23rd of every year as the celebration of the Yoruba Peace Treaty

The current political leaders of the Yoruba people remain vigilant in everything that has to do with the security of the people. For years, various branches of the armed forces have existed, working tirelessly to combat insecurity. Nigeria is struggling with rising security challenges across all six geopolitical zones. In the Southwest, a region home to millions of Nigerians, Yorubas who share a common ancestry, beliefs, values, and culture, recurring security issues such as ritual killings, clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers, armed robbery, and kidnapping have become prevalent. Over the years, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), has struggled to effectively tackle these crimes in the

²⁹⁶ The Nigeria Tribune, 1886 Yoruba Peace Treaty and Lessons of Yoruba National Unity, The Nigeria Tribune Newspaper, September 26, 2019, Retrieved on December 6, 2024. Available at: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/tribuneonlineng.com/1886-yoruba-peace-treaty-and-lessons-of-yoruba-national-unity/>

region.²⁹⁷ In Southwest Nigeria, the governors of the six states worked together to establish a regional security force known as 'Operation Amotekun' (Yoruba: meaning 'Leopard'), which was officially launched in January 2020 in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. Shortly after this, the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG) introduced a counter initiative, unveiling a fierce lion as the symbol for their security programme, 'Shege-Ka-Fasa' (Hausa: meaning 'I dare you'), which was launched in Kaduna State on February 5, 2020.²⁹⁸ In the Southeast, the leading Igbo socio-cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, proposed the creation of a regional security outfit, potentially named 'Operation Ogbunigwe'.

The Yoruba traditional leaders have committed to fully supporting the Amotekun security initiative and the state governments in their efforts to tackle the escalating insecurity in the Southwest.²⁹⁹ They recognise the urgent need to intensify the fight against the growing wave of criminal activities that continue to destabilise the region. By lending their influence and resources, the traditional leaders aim to strengthen the regional security framework, thereby increasing the pressure on the forces of insecurity that relentlessly plague the area. Their support is seen as crucial not only in addressing immediate security concerns but also in fostering a united front against the persistent threats that have been undermining the peace and wellbeing of the Yoruba people. Through this collaboration, the hope is to bring an end to the recurring challenges and to restore a sense of safety and stability to the Southwest.

The people of Southwest Nigeria are undoubtedly highly religious, with Christianity and Islam being the most prominent religions among the Yoruba people today. The people of this region are known for their strong faith and earnest devotion to God/Allah, often prioritizing prayer above all else. This has, at times, led to criticism that they may have placed prayer above other important aspects of life. However, religious leaders continue to encourage people to pray fervently and not lose faith. Believers in both Christianity and Islam firmly believe that their prayers are answered and that their Creator never ignores them. Religious leaders persist in advising their congregations, both in mosques and churches, to avoid bad behaviors that could prevent them from entering the kingdom of heaven (Jannah), which the people of the Southwest refer to as *Orun*. These efforts have played a key role in maintaining peace in the Southwestern region of Nigeria, despite the security challenges faced globally in recent times.

²⁹⁷ O. M. Olubade, A. O. Ogunnoiki, "Regional Security Initiative and the Security Challenges in Nigeria: The Case of Operation Amotekun" *Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affairs*. Vol. 8 No. 2, Dec. 2020 Retrieved on Dec 6, 2024. Available at: <http://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cujpia88>

²⁹⁸ Enyiocha & Idowu, Northern Group launches Operation 'Shege Ka Fasa' Security Outfit, Channels Television, February 6, 2020. Accessed from <http://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cujpia88>.

²⁹⁹ Amotekun: Ekiti Monarchs laud Recruitment process, Ekiti News, July 17, 2020.

CONCLUSION

This research provides an analysis of the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria, focusing on their influence in promoting regional security, which is a key contributor to maintaining peace. The indigenous knowledge of the Yoruba people is deeply rooted in their culture and traditions. Despite the impact of modern civilisation, they continue to blend both contemporary and traditional wisdom to address present-day challenges. A prime example of this is the creation of *Amotekun*, a regional security initiative aimed at fostering peace and ensuring safety in the region. It is important to recognise that the indigenous wisdom of the people of Southwest Nigeria extends beyond security matters. The Yoruba are also renowned for their expertise in herbal medicine, having discovered remedies for various medical conditions that modern science has yet to fully explain. In light of advances in technology and science, it is crucial that Nigerians do not disregard their indigenous knowledge and wisdom. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern scientific advancements, there is potential to resolve future challenges and contribute to the overall development of the nation.

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Listening for Progress: Rethinking the Symphonic Orchestra within Global Development, Peacebuilding, and Conflict Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, cultural policies have embraced the notion that music can foster cross-cultural dialogue, bridging cultural divides, promote social cohesion, and contribute to conflict resolution. While such narratives position music as a universal language, this paper questions the efficacy of these claims, arguing that such assumptions misrepresent both the nature of musical practice and the socio-political realities it engages with. Situated at the intersection of cultural policy, development studies, critical socio-musicology, and ethnomusicology, my research is informed by decolonial theory and post-development critique, drawing on Arturo Escobar, and referencing Cynthia Cohen, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, and Rachel Beckles Willson to interrogate the instrumentalization of Western classical music within cultural diplomacy. Rather than asking what music can do for development, this paper calls for a shift in cultural and development policy: a more critical approach that examines how music reveals the structural and ideological limits of the development discourse itself.

Keywords:

Critiques of development, cultural diplomacy, cultural policy, arts in peacebuilding

Introduction

Increasingly, cultural policies have embraced the notion that music can foster cross-cultural dialogue, bridging cultural divides, promote social cohesion, and contribute to conflict resolution. While such narratives position music as a universal language, this paper questions the efficacy of these claims, arguing that such assumptions misrepresent both the nature of musical practice and the socio-political

realities it engages with. Situated at the intersection of cultural policy, development studies, critical socio-musicology, and ethnomusicology, my research is informed by decolonial theory and post-development critique, drawing on Arturo Escobar, and referencing Cynthia Cohen, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, and Rachel Beckles Willson to interrogate the instrumentalization of the Western symphonic tradition within cultural diplomacy.

My methodological approach combines critical analysis and comparative case studies, examining three international symphonic orchestral initiatives framed as peacebuilding projects, each promoted through cultural diplomacy and development rhetoric. The three case studies focus on issues of institutional goals, programmatic language, media outputs, and organisational publicity. This approach allows for an investigation into how the “personal” and “institutional” diverge in formality and practice. I argue that peacebuilding through music, when framed within dominant cultural development discourses, risks reproducing the very hierarchies and exclusions it seeks to address.

This paper examines the role of music within contemporary cultural policy frameworks that seek to mobilize the arts as tools for peacebuilding and international development. I will dissect current development frameworks through a critical lens and assess music as a medium within development and peacebuilding. These analyses will be grounded by case studies of three contemporary symphonic institutions, including the Youth Orchestra of Ukraine, the South Asian Symphony Foundation, and the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra. Rather than asking what music can do for development, this paper argues for a shift in cultural and development policy, calling for a more critical approach that examines how music reveals certain structural and ideological limits of development discourse.

Deconstructing Development

Since 1960, the United Nations has moved through several decades of development proposals and initiatives. At the opening of the 1st Development Decade (1960-1970), development moved beyond “material needs” but also began to address “the improvement of the social conditions of his life and his broad human aspirations³⁰⁰. This is followed by the 2nd and 3rd Development Decades which began to include intellectual growth, cultural preservation, and human rights. By the 1990s, the Human Development Report was launched, emphasising the report’s focus on “people—and about how development enlarges their choices”, arguing that “a person’s access to income may be one of

³⁰⁰ Taken from the introduction to the Secretary-General’s report on Proposals for Action, E/3613 + Corr.2, U.N. Documentation Research Guides through the digital Dag Hammarskjöld Library, quoted from U.N. Documentation: Development: “1960-1970, 1st Development Decade”. <<https://research.un.org/en/docs/dev/>>

the choices, but it is not the sum total of human endeavour”³⁰¹. The shift towards “human development” and “cultural development” marked an important transition in the 2000s. In this first section, I will explore the histories and foundations of development thought and the evolution of development framework. I will explore the nature of development, the language in which it operates, and postcolonial criticisms of development frameworks.

Language and Development

Understanding development begins at its language. To structure and evaluate its progress means to recognise its frameworks and limitations, and to propose specific viable schemes to approach them. Although dictionary definitions can scope out its description, the evaluation of development is undeterminable without a criterion of measurement. As such, the U.N. Millenium Development Goals and succeeding Sustainable Development Goals help determine the “goals” of development, creating objectives, thresholds, and standards.

Initiatives of human development followed the same approach and reasoned that the creative arts can aid development in achieving such goals. However, the language of development is incompatible with the language of the creative arts. Different languages practice different functions and communicative behaviours. Even casual, colloquial communications require immersing in the language’s culture and understanding often untranslatable connotations. For written and spoken languages, specific sounds or words are correlated to specific meanings. In contrast, the musical language holds no inherent definitions, and to comprehend its meanings requires a further dimension of musical interpretation. Therefore, incentivising human and cultural development through the promotion of certain musical cultures risks an incompatibility between languages. In the next section, I will continue to consider language incompatibilities as well as other postcolonial criticisms of development, primarily drawing from Arturo Escobar.

Development Criticisms

Arturo Escobar traces the beginnings of development to the United States under the Truman presidency. The Truman Doctrine, Escobar argues, was ambitious: its intent was to trigger and initiate the necessary conditions to replicate “features that characterized the ‘advanced’ societies of the time” (Escobar, 2012: 3–4). This included promotions of industrialization and urbanization, technological advancements of agriculture, rapid growth of material production, improvement of living standards, and the adoption of “modern” education and cultural values (Escobar, 2012: 3–4). As such, capital, science, and technology were, in the eyes of Truman, the primary components that would make a

³⁰¹ Quoted from U.N. Documentation: Development: “1991-1999, Human Development Report”. <https://research.un.org/en/docs/dev/1991-1999>

revolution possible (Escobar, 2012: 4). Such a revolution would also be impossible without shifts in ideas that conformed to the language of development utilised by the U.S.

Thus, the language of development is entrenched in such histories and contexts. It practices a framework to which the dichotomy between the “developed” and “underdeveloped” is introduced. Escobar argues that seeing development as “historically produced discourse” involves an examination of how countries began to see themselves as “underdeveloped” in the early post-World War II period (Escobar, 2012: 6). How “to develop” became a fundamental problem for them, and how they “embarked upon the task of ‘un-under developing’ themselves by subjecting their societies to increasingly systematic, detailed, and comprehensive interventions” (Escobar, 2012: 6). In this sense, development continues to colonise, but concealed in the form of economic growth, international aid, peacebuilding, and the promise of security. In the next section, I will examine applications of the creative arts and music in development frameworks.

Contextualising Music within Development Frameworks

Human development efforts, especially in utilising the creative arts “as a resource (...) to secure other development goals, such as health promotion, human rights, or economic activity” (Ware et al., 2024: xxv), presents an incompatibility between the arts and development. This incompatibility stems firstly from the approach which development is pursued, and secondly from the language under which it operates. The integration of a “human dimension” (ul Haq, 1995: 4) means to integrate the “personal” into a system of impersonal metrics. In this section, I will explore the arguments for human and culture-centred development, how music has been used to aid development, and the potential complications and drawbacks of utilising the creative arts in development work.

Music and Cultural Development

Though development theories have acknowledged the importance of involving the “human dimension”, the acknowledgement itself serves no practical solution to include and address these new concerns nor how they are measured. Mahbub ul Haq (1995: 4) notices an inconsistency within this new framework and era of development, observing that “there has been little consistent, comprehensive analysis of how to integrate people into development as both a means and an end”. He also questions the implications for economic planning when placing people at the heart of development (ul Haq, 1995: 4). This integration forms the basis of human development that, beyond economic goals, human well-being matters within the scope of development and is worthy of integrating into its schemes.

Hershlag maintains that “the main difficulty consists not in defining the essence of development, but in the ability to carry out the well-meaning designs and theoretical assumptions” (1984: 36). He argues that this ability explains “why many contemporary growth models gravitate, in the final analysis, to tangible and relatively easily measurable variables” (Hershlag, 1984: 36). Nominally, the U.N.’s Human Development Index appears to integrate a “human dimension” within development ideas. However, the dependency of development frameworks on quantifiable metrics that provide explicit answers and tangible results renders it implausible to integrate a truly “human-centred” approach.

Development goals and objectives lie only within a narrow evaluative and quantitative framework. Claims that cultural development, especially regarding the creative arts, promotes “agency and dignity” (Ware et al., 2024: xxv) remain superficial. The language of development and diplomacy and the language of the arts may be both capable of fostering understanding between parties in conflict, but their framework of communication circulate within entirely different spheres. Establishing these differences and problematising current development frameworks is a foundation for engaging critically with music within human development. The next subsection discusses the language of music and its place in development.

Music, a Universal Language?

Many artists and peacebuilders propose that music is fitting for reconciling adversaries because it facilitates “communication, understanding, and empathy across differences of all kinds” (Cohen, 2007: 26). However, without aligning the musical language with development theory, music cannot serve towards either accomplishing quantifiable development goals or improving welfare. Contextualising music within human development requires an understanding of the distinctive characteristics between development language and the language of music, establishing the problems with typecasting music as universal language.

“For several different reasons, we as musician-peacebuilders should use caution when asserting that music is a universal language”, argues Cynthia Cohen (2007: 27). She writes that “although there are some aspects of musicality that are human universals, recent developments in (...) musicology suggest that different musical traditions are actually more dissimilar than similar” (Cohen, 2007: 27). Cohen’s caution of musical universality demonstrates precisely the difficulty in aligning development and musical languages. Because musical meaning relies on specific social and cultural awarenesses and associations, listeners and practitioners of music also appreciate different aspects of the music-making. Her research working with practitioners in different conflict regions shows that “it is not music’s universal appeal that gives it much of its power as a peacebuilding resource, but rather recognition of the distinctive meanings that emerge from its place in historical events and cultural

traditions” (Cohen, 2007: 27). Music’s universal appeal does not make it a universal language. It is at once a universal vernacular and a local dialect. The next subsection furthers this argument and focuses on the Western classical symphonic tradition, demonstrating how the symphony operates as an institution.

Rethinking the Western Classical Tradition and the Symphonic Institution

Western classical music has transformed and integrated its way of listening into the public ear through systemised music theory, scales, tuning, and musical analysis. Western musical cultures, instruments, and theories have become foundational to most musical education. The symphonic orchestra is, too, a branch within such an institution. Beyond its contribution to solidifying and imposing Western musical hearing within music education, the symphonic orchestra is a prime example of a musical institution used as development advertisement. Tim Carter points to the orchestra as both an institution and a corporate musical instrument (Lawson, 2003: 1–2). Jacques Attali (1985: 65–67) characterizes it as a strictly ruled “society” in which the conductor is “a simulacrum of autocratic governance” (Willson, 2009: 335). The symphonic institution projects a symbol of “practiced” peace, a rehearsed performance of cohesion despite orchestral musicians’ varying musical backgrounds, training, and cultures.

To fit into progress-drive, quantitative development frameworks, hierarchical musical institutions promise the most effective results. This is because institutions practice top-down approaches rather than grassroots operations, providing support but establishing institutional command. While grassroots, bottom-up approaches are encouraged by advocates of human development, it is nevertheless unsuited to the goal of development: quantifiable, measurable progress. Attali (1985) observes that while orchestral “performers (...) are trained (...) to strive for a perfect, standard sound, for an unbroken, polished surface”, the conductor “[usurps] complete control over interpretation and needed only the assurance of dependable sound production from the labouring musician” (Attali, 1985: 152). The symphonic institution is thus an optimal candidate for investigating the problematic areas within development frameworks. In the next section, I will apply development criticisms to existing peacebuilding and development-focused symphonic organisations in three case studies.

The Symphonic Institution and Development: Three Case Studies

For many, “culture is a good in itself, a form of self-expression through which people can find the agency and dignity that are intrinsic to human development” (Ware et al., 2024: xxv). However, though

this expression validates culture practitioners, it permits only a cursory application of culture within development. I will explore, in the following three case studies, how symphonic orchestras and institutions have borrowed and employed development frameworks. Beyond this, I will analyse the ideological aims and strategic goals of three orchestral institutions: the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, the South Asian Symphony Foundation, and West–Eastern Divan Orchestra.

The Youth Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Gienow-Hecht argues that within the last century, “orchestras have changed from places of international encounter to stages of national self-representation” (2012: 19). Such an account describes precisely the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (YSOU) whose primary purpose is in national representation and preservation. Founded in 2016 by Ukrainian conductor Oksana Lyniv, the YSOU was modelled after a German national youth orchestra, *Bundesjugendorchester*.

Supported by German musical and journalistic institutions³⁰² as well as other European organisations, the YSOU’s missions include: first, “[being] a platform for the development of young Ukrainian musicians through international and national projects”; second, promoting classical music through “communication strategy, music programs, multidisciplinary and audio-visual projects”; and third, to “spread Ukrainian music (...) and presenting them in a global cultural context”³⁰³. The main principles of YSOU contain “European values of cultural diversity, freedom and tolerance”³⁰⁴. Videos and documentaries of the orchestra were filmed and distributed through Deutsche Welle’s YouTube channel.

Within historical and contemporary political contexts, the YSOU’s goals display a purposeful preservation of Ukrainian sovereignty and resistance against Russian aggression. However, the orchestra also serves a purpose within international politics. Gienow-Hecht proposes that the “political function of symphony orchestras on tour abroad is not just that they play beautiful music trying to establish dialogue but that they seek to display leadership and symbolise the authority behind the orchestra in a foreign environment while audiences remain quiet and attentive” (2012: 26). In the case of YSOU, their political function strives to symbolise authority in the presence of European audiences, with the support of European institutions.

³⁰² Supported by Bundesjugendorchester, the German classical music festival Beethovenfest, and the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW).

³⁰³ Quotations taken from the Youth Orchestra of Ukraine website, from the “About” page. <<https://ysou.com.ua/en/about/>>

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Beyond a performance of leadership and authority, there are “huge political responsibilities on the shoulders of [those] who have dedicated their lives not to peace and conflict resolution but (...) to a perfect rendition of Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony” (Gienow-Hecht, 2012: 17). These responsibilities are, however, objectives of the institution rather than individual members of the orchestra; the musicians are merely a symbolic piece of the puzzle. Gienow-Hecht asserts that while “music directors (...) are slaves of the score and the repertory, there is no doubt who determines silence and sound, performance, and behaviour in any given concert hall in the world” (2012: 27–28). This points to a performative hierarchy within the symphonic institution, one that advertises for a common objective imposed by top-down, institutional methods.

Thus, the international development and peacebuilding goals of the orchestral institution are separate from the goals of its musician members, whose primary purpose is as Gienow-Hecht (2012: 17) discusses, a “perfect rendition” and performance. This divide between an “institutional symbol” and the “personal practice” of musicians demonstrates that orchestral institutions conform to top-bottom approaches. This idea is further explored in the next orchestral case study, the South Asian Symphony Foundation.

The South Asian Symphony Foundation

The “personal” backgrounds of musicians are often used to advertise cultural exchange and transculturality. The South Asian Symphony Foundation (SASF), founded by Ambassador Nirupama Menon Rao, boasts a youth orchestra with musicians from countries³⁰⁵ across South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and even North America and Europe. In Rao’s opening speech in a SASF Peace Notes Concert in 2022, she claims, “South Asia extends (...) all over the world (...), so we have expanded that definition—we’ve gone beyond geopolitics. (...) Music (...) breaches those shadow lines”³⁰⁶. When introducing musicians from Sri Lanka, Rao adds that “Sri Lanka particularly is going through a difficult time. (...) We share their pain at this moment, and we would like a better future to dawn for that country”³⁰⁷. Rao’s speech illustrates two points: first, the divide between musicians and the institution; and second, how music alone is insufficient for peacebuilding.

Public-facing, institutional publicity and the daily lives of musicians cannot be equated. This divide between the “institutional symbol” and the “personal practice” of music-making displays this

³⁰⁵ Countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, and others.

³⁰⁶ Quoted from a video published on 30 November 2022 on the South Asian Symphony Foundation’s YouTube channel, “Peace Notes Concert | Chennai | The South Asian Symphony Orchestra | Full Concert”, a South Asian Symphony Orchestra concert hosted in Chennai, July 31, 2022. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oris2-fRHww&t=581s>>

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

misconception. Peaceful cooperation in a symphonic setting is regulated by institutional hierarchy. This symbol is displaced from real practice, promoting peace as an external formality rather than internal implementation. Musicians obey institutional directions and institutions advertise peacebuilding.

The SASF website also reflects the insufficiency of peacebuilding through music alone:

Orchestras are beautiful creations, they transcend race, religion, language, and borders. They are microcosms of the world – where different musicians and instruments join in harmony together, where walls begin to crumble, and differences recede. In an orchestra, all musicians are equal (...). Over time, the orchestra can be an avenue to greater cooperation and be a peace-builder. As its members play, they have to listen to each other to balance their sound within the larger sound and make a performance happen³⁰⁸.

These statements are partial truths; orchestral musicians *are* equal and must balance their sound within the larger orchestra. However, the orchestral hierarchy appoints the conductor in charge of the sound and rhythm of the orchestra as well as control over musical interpretations. Such as in the case of SASF, conductors often also double as the orchestra's artistic director, selecting repertoire, commissioning works, and curating the orchestra's presence. Thus, while the symphony orchestra can claim to promote cooperation and peacebuilding, it exists only within a self-referential musical language and a structure that remains hierarchical.

According to their website, SASF aims for the Orchestra “to point the way to recognition of the fact that South Asia is in many ways an integer, bound more together by our commonalities than our differences. To quote the famous words of Ambassador Vijayalakshmi Pandit (...) ‘Let us sweat in peace, not bleed in war’”³⁰⁹. As Cohen argues, “creating feelings of affinity without doing the hard work necessary to challenge dynamics of oppression can add insult to injury for members of oppressed communities, and do little more than allay the guilt of those who are from more privileged groups” (Cohen, 2007: 26). While such musical institutions build bridges and platforms for cultural exchange and transculturality, they must move beyond a development formality. In the next subsection, I will further explore the divide between music as a “symbol” and “practice” through the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra.

The West–Eastern Divan Orchestra

An orchestral institution aimed towards building bridges between countries with political tensions and conflicts, especially one like the West–Eastern Divan, is merely a “performance” and a “symbol” of

³⁰⁸ Taken from SASF's website, quoted from the “About Us” page. <<https://www.symphonysouthasia.org/about-us>>

³⁰⁹ Quoted from SASF's “About Us” page.

peace and cooperation. Willson references Ghada Karmi³¹⁰, who argues that “reconciliation and togetherness are consequences of a settlement, not antecedents to it”, and [warns] that the gentility of its European concerts could be seen to betray the existential struggle of those living in Palestine (Willson, 2009: 320). Similarly, Cohen argues that “artist-peace builders might also misuse [the] potential of music (...) by constructing or augmenting feelings of affinity among adversaries without engaging them also in grappling with differences and confronting questions of past and present injustice” (Cohen, 2007: 26).

The divide between “symbolism” and “practice” in institutions such as the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra further demonstrates the incompatibility between music and peacebuilding efforts. A symphonic institution founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward W. Said, the West–Eastern Divan was built upon the urgent realisation for “an alternative way to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”³¹¹. Like the SASF, they boast being “equal in music”³¹². The West–Eastern Divan also attempted to bridge music and dialogue that addressed the political tensions and realities of Israel and Arab countries (Willson, 2009: 327). However, Willson found that this attempt was not only ineffective, but that some musicians objected the orchestra’s political engagement and preferred apoliticism (2009: 327–28). These reactions demonstrate the disconnect between larger, symbolic institutional efforts in peacebuilding and dialogue, and the personal practices of the orchestra musicians.

It is important to recognise that music can create platforms and bridges between distant cultures. However, music is a self-referential language that cannot reach beyond the musical dimension. While musical performances can symbolise certain development and peacebuilding values, the divide between personal practices of musicians and symbolic institutional messages provide merely a rehearsed “peacebuilding performance”, separate from any real conflict or conflict transformation. The divide between utopian, symbolic music-making and the real, physical consequences of international conflict is a gaping chasm between music and development efforts.

³¹⁰ Taken from Ghada Karmi’s article, “Can Jews and Arabs Work Together for Peace?” written originally Arabic in *Al-Hayat* in August 2003.

³¹¹ Taken from West–Eastern Divan’s website, quoted from the “Founders” page. <<https://west-eastern-divan.org/founders>>

³¹² Taken from West–Eastern Divan’s website, displayed at the top of “Orchestra” page. <<https://west-eastern-divan.org/divan-orchestra>>

Conclusion

The symphonic orchestra is an institution rehearsed for the international political stage. The hierarchical structure, the divide between musician objectives and institutional goals, and a practiced imagery of peace betray its claim to aid human development, peacebuilding, or conflict transformation. Building peace through music can promote bonding experiences between musicians, but this bridge exists only within the language of music. Playing, practicing, and perfecting a piece of music is the sole objective and task of a musician. Though the symphonic institution's access to music education and widespread recognition provides an easy platform between distant cultures to build rapport through shared experiences, this essentialisation of the symphonic institution involves consequences that perpetuate these complicated discourses.

As Escobar writes, "reality (...) had been colonised by the development discourse, and those who were dissatisfied with this state of affairs had to struggle for bits and pieces of freedom within it, in the hope that in the process a different reality could be constructed" (Escobar, 2012: 5). The case studies not only displayed the difficulty in utilising music within development, but also why these symphonic institutions can appropriate development claims within their hierarchical structures. While the goals of development promise appealing progress, it rests upon dichotomy between the "developed" and "underdeveloped". It is thus imperative to rethink the ways in which to achieve these goals. The creative arts cannot effectively aid development frameworks unless the quantitative, evaluative language of development is reconsidered and their frameworks reimaged.

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From Heritage to Well-Being: Public Orchestration and Civic Wealth Creation in Historic City Centres

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Public Administration (PA) can engage local communities in the governance of cultural heritage (CH) to enhance quality of life, using the Celio district of Rome as a pilot case study. A historic area near the Colosseum, Celio has been significantly affected by overtourism, leading to social and cultural disruption. Framed by the concept of Civic Wealth Creation (CWC), the research investigates collaborative dynamics among key stakeholders—communities, supporters, and entrepreneurs—facilitated by a public orchestrator. Employing an action-research methodology, the study evaluates the impact of the newly opened Archaeological Park and Museum in Celio. The paper argues that sustainable CH governance requires structured orchestration, community-centered design, and narrative integration to enhance urban well-being. Our findings offer actionable insights for public authorities and cultural institutions.

Keywords:

Diversity and Transformative Power of Culture; Culture and Well-Being; Civic Wealth Creation; Participatory Cultural Governance; Community Engagement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This piece of research has been financed by the European Union - Next Generation EU NRRP Mission 4 Component 2 Investment 1.3 through the project PE 00000020 CHANGES-CUP F83C22001650006

Introduction: Context of Investigation

Cultural Heritage (CH) is increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental lever for fostering social impact and enhancing overall quality of life. CH, in all its forms—both tangible and intangible—is a valuable resource that generates intrinsic values (Throsby, 1999)—whether aesthetic, historical, spiritual-religious, social, or symbolic (Throsby, 2003)—which form the roots and legacy that communities and societies transmit from one generation to the next. The experience of CH significantly contributes to the well-being of both individuals and communities (Biondi et al., 2020). Such benefits encompass the reinforcement of collective identities, the promotion of social cohesion and creative expression (Lenzerini, 2011) placing people at the heart of its stewardship. Moreover, interventions on CH bear considerable economic potential serving as a catalyst for tourism (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009), underpinning cultural initiatives (Del Barrio et al., 2012), and acting as a source of inspiration for design innovation and artisanal production (Friel & Santagata, 2008). CH need to be sustained in its relevance and vitality, it must be carefully preserved and continually revitalized. In fact, the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe (2005) emphasizes that CH is a common good that depends on the presence of a community to sustain and renew it. Community become a spontaneous and dynamic subject of action, linked by a shared interest in heritage (Colomer, 2023).

Communities that serve as custodians of widespread CH are increasingly threatened by complex socio-economic phenomena such as migration and depopulation in rural and deprived areas, mass tourism and gentrification in historic city centres. These dynamics weaken and displace the communities that are essential to addressing to preserve and revitalize CH, due to their deep-rooted connections to place, culture, and values.

In more detail, in cities with strong tourism economies, overtourism (Amore et al., 2020; Higgins, 2020) has produced a comparable effect: the exodus of local communities from historic centers. Tourist congestion, rising living costs, and the proliferation of visitor-oriented businesses push residents to relocate, depriving cities of their most vital resource—the local community. So, research calls for solutions that reinvigorate or regenerate cultural heritage preserving the link with their communities.

To address this complexity, the framework of Civic Wealth Creation (CWC), introduced by Lumpkin and Bacq (2019), and applied to the context of CH-led regeneration projects by Aureli et al. (2023) may offer a valuable lens for investigate how to enhance CH and preserve the link with local communities.

CWC explains how collaboration among multiple actors and across different sectors can enhance community wealth by generating impacts that go beyond the tangible value created for individual stakeholders or organizations. Cultural Wealth refers to the economic, social, and communal assets

and endowments of a community and it is the outcome of processes in which diverse stakeholders and citizens collaborate, participate, negotiate, and come together around actions aimed at improving their well-being and vitality through cooperation, shared cultural values, and mutual exchange (Aureli, Del Baldo & Demartini, 2021a; 2021b.) In fact, collaborations based on shared cultural identity and common goals are considered fundamental to preserve the quality of life (Borin, 2015). Furthermore, the need for more investigation on how the Public Administration (PA), acting as an orchestrator for CH-led projects, can engage local stakeholders and collaborate with the community is an emerging field of research as claimed by Biondi et al. (2020) and Aureli et al. (2023).

Reflecting on these core issues, our research question is:

- How can PA activate urban regeneration processes that preserve local heritage, involve local stakeholders, place communities at the center, and finally enhance the citizens' quality of life?

The study adopts a qualitative methodology – conceiving the case study as a real-world “laboratory” for action research as researchers collaborate with local stakeholders to co-design and test community engagement strategies. The research is embedded in a formal collaboration between Roma Tre University and the Rome Superintendency, and focuses on the evaluation of a specific initiative launched by the Municipality of Rome, as part of a broader project for the regeneration of Rome's historic center (*Progetto Car.Me*), linked to the newly opened Archaeological Park and Museum in the Celio district. The latter is an historic neighborhood located adjacent to the Colosseum, which has in recent years undergone significant transformation due to overtourism. Residential housing has been increasingly converted into short-term rentals, and traditional commercial activities have been replaced by tourism-driven businesses. Despite these pressures, Celio retains a strong cultural identity and active local associations. The district's current phase—marked by the establishment of a new archaeological museum—offers a unique opportunity to test how heritage-led strategies can revitalize civic life.

The reminder of the paper is organized as follows: section 2 introduces the theoretical framework of Civic Wealth Creation (CWC) and its relevance to cultural heritage governance. Section 3 describes the action-research methodology and data collection process. Section 4 presents the findings, organised around the three CWC mechanisms: engaged participation, collaborative innovation, and resource mobilization. Section 5 discusses the implications for PA, highlighting challenges of orchestration, fragmented collaboration, and the role of narrative in civic engagement.

Civic Wealth Creation as our Framework

To address this complexity, the concept of Civic Wealth Creation (CWC), introduced by Lumpkin and Bacq (2019), provides a valuable theoretical lens. CWC refers to the intentional efforts of collaboration of different stakeholders to uplift the overall civic well-being of any society or community (Kutter, 2019). CWC explains how cross-sector and multi-actor collaboration can enhance community wealth by generating impacts that extend beyond the tangible value produced for individual stakeholders or organizations (Brenton & Slawinski, 2023; Fortunato & Alter, 2015; Fröcklin et al., 2018). Scholars are debating that CWC may serve as a possible answer to the existence of a questionable just world (Hertel, Bacq, & Lumpkin, 2020) by addressing economic, social, and communal problems (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). It might also play a huge role in building communities through innovation, stakeholder engagement, and novel problem-solving techniques (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019).

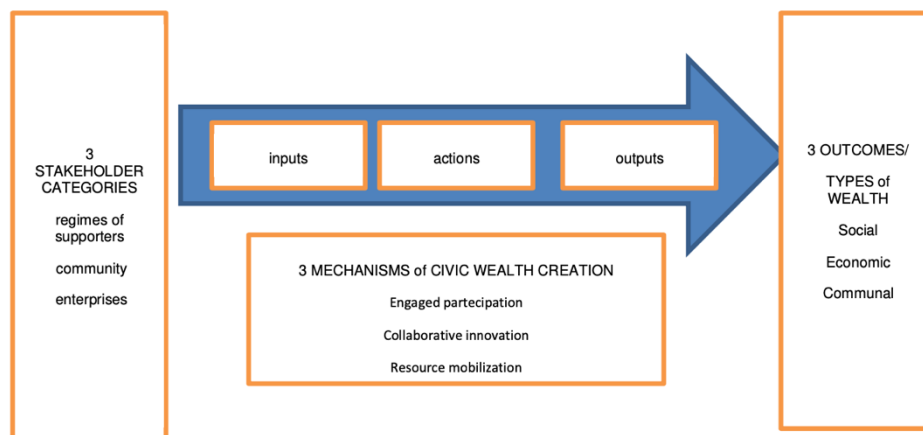


FIGURE 1. CWC framework based on the work of Lumpkin and Bacq (2019)

Source:

As shown in Figure 1, the original framework rests on three interconnected layers:

1. Stakeholder Categories – typically involving three types of actors:
 - Supporters (e.g., public administrations, policy enablers);
 - Communities (e.g., residents, civic associations, activists);
 - Enterprises (e.g., cultural and creative businesses, cooperatives).
2. Mechanisms – the operational core of CWC, through which civic wealth is actively co-produced:
 - Engaged Participation, where diverse actors are meaningfully included in governance processes;
 - Collaborative Innovation, through which novel solutions and hybrid governance forms emerge;

- Resource Mobilization, defined as the shared use of tangible and intangible resources.
3. Outcomes – the forms of wealth generated through these mechanisms:
- Social (e.g., trust, inclusion),
 - Economic (e.g., sustainable entrepreneurship, local value chains),
 - Communal (e.g., symbolic identity, sense of place).

What makes the CWC framework innovative is the collective action achieved through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders and regular citizens with different logics. The mechanisms for CWC creation occur only when the different stakeholders intentionally pursue a joint interest (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019).

In the field of Cultural Heritage (CH) studies, the CWC framework has recently been applied (Aureli, Del Baldo & Demartini, 2021a, 2021b, 2023) to explore how actors from various sectors can come together to form multi-stakeholder coalitions aimed at revitalizing the CH of a small historic Italian city. In adapting the CWC framework to the cultural sector, the authors highlighted the orchestrator role that local governments, can play through funding cultural-led urban regeneration projects.

In a recent study on CH as a lever for generating societal impact, Demartini et al. (2024) explored the dynamics of collaboration among cultural associations in a historic district in the city centre of Rome. This area has been affected by over-tourism, which, in recent years, has disrupted local well-being and daily life. Numerous residential properties have been converted into holiday rentals, while traditional artisanal shops have been replaced by tourist-oriented retail stores and night life venues. Building on this context as a paradigmatic case, the authors examined whether and how local cultural actors (public, private and not for profit organisations) could actively engage local communities and citizens in taking care of heritage assets and maintaining alive the identity of places, ultimately enhancing citizens' quality of life.

These studies—part of a consistent research trajectory—are grounded in the idea that a shared commitment of citizens and communities to enhancing local well-being is essential for the success of CH-driven regeneration initiatives (Franch, 2020). This is connected to the belief that individuals can evolve into “cultural citizens”—active participants in cultural life—who contribute to cultivating culture as a driver of endogenous development, ultimately generating long-term value for the local community (Sacco & Segre, 2009).

This theoretical framing underpins our analysis of the orchestration strategies used to mobilize civic engagement. It also informs our evaluation of the projects's ability to produce civic wealth—not only as an outcome, but as a process of relational, cultural, and political significance.

Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative research design, focused on a case study method and guided by the principle of action research. Action research (Avison et al., 1999; O'Brien, 1998) is particularly suited to this study as it is both participatory and iterative, enabling the research team to engage with stakeholders and foster change. The objective is to explore how public initiatives grounded in CH—specifically the *Progetto Car.Me* in the Celio district—contribute to CWC through collaborative governance and stakeholder engagement. The case study was selected for its paradigmatic relevance: the Celio district, located in the heart of Rome near the Colosseum, is currently undergoing a urban regeneration following by the recent opening of the Archaeological Park and Museum, an initiative that seeks to reactivate the district's cultural vibrancy. This context offers a "living lab" to observe and assess participatory governance mechanisms and the civic value generated through public intervention.

In fact, in the context of our case study, all these dynamics take on a particularly complex and layered form. New governance configurations are emerging, in which PA act as orchestrators—not only coordinating urban regeneration efforts but explicitly pursuing social and economic impacts that align with community well-being. At the same time, institutional actors such as the Rome Superintendency assume a dual role: as guardians of cultural authenticity and as facilitators of cultural transmission. Their priorities emphasize the long-term preservation of identity, education, and symbolic meaning—elements of what might be called "Culture with a capital C". Thus, the Celio case study provides a concrete setting in which the CWC framework can be operationalized and examined. It allows us to explore how different actors—public, institutional, and civic—engage in co-producing value.

Data Collection

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted between the end of 2023 and 2025 with key stakeholders involved in or impacted by the project. The interviews lasted about 90 minutes each and have been addressed to no.13 informant people, selected as key representatives of the main institutions involved in the heritage regeneration project.

These interviews were organised into two main groups:

- Institutional actors, particularly representatives of the PA and cultural authorities (e.g., the person in charge of the urban redevelopment project approved by the Mayor of Rome and by the city councillor for culture; and two key representative of the museum in the

archaeological zone, who work for the Rome Superintendency). These interviews explored their strategic vision, objectives for urban regeneration, and their role as orchestrators within the CWC framework, aligned with the research questions.

- Local stakeholders, including cultural operators, educators, and entrepreneurs active in the district. Participants included: a person in charge of a large civic association based in the district; two small social entrepreneurs who organise cultural initiatives and events for artists; representatives of four cultural associations located in the area; an educator who represents the network of public and private organisations that provide primary education in the area; the responsible for a research centre involved in project of digital transformation of an archaeological site and, finally, the representative of a large private cultural tourism operator granted the management of a well-known archeological site located in the area. These interviews focused on stakeholder perceptions of the project, specifically their awareness and evaluation of the benefits derived from *Progetto Car.Me*, including social, cultural, and economic impacts.

In addition, the authors gathered public and internal documents of the organizations/associations interviewed. These included information retrieved from official websites, organizational statutes, strategic planning documents, records of public meetings, and content shared via social media platforms. These materials were analysed to complement and triangulate the data collected through interviews, ensuring a richer and more reliable interpretation of the case.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using content meaning analysis, a method that seeks to identify, interpret, and synthesise recurring themes, perceptions, and value judgments in participants' narratives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Particular attention was given to extracting key excerpts that reflected the multi-dimensional impacts of the initiative and the nature of collaborative dynamics across stakeholder groups.

This interpretive approach allows for capturing the richness and complexity of stakeholder engagement in a real-world setting, making it especially well-suited for exploring the mechanisms outlined in the CWC framework (engaged participation, collaborative innovation, and resource mobilization). The qualitative insights were triangulated with public project documents, strategic communications from the Municipality of Rome, and the institutional activities of the Superintendency to ensure coherence and contextual grounding. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide both empirical evidence and critical reflection on how heritage-led urban regeneration can serve as a catalyst for CWC in contemporary city governance.

Findings: an analysis of the three CWC mechanisms

The case of Celio reveals a fragile but active civic ecosystem, where institutional ambitions and grassroots energies intersect, sometimes harmoniously, often in tension. Applying the threefold lens of CWC—engaged participation, collaborative innovation, and resource mobilization—we observe not a fully functional civic economy, but a complex civic process in the making. While each of these mechanisms manifests across various actors and practices in the district, they do so in isolated, episodic, and often disconnected ways.

Engaged Participation

If participation is the first mechanism of CWC, Celio district shows both a strong desire to participate and a structural difficulty in doing so. Engaged participation entails the active involvement of community members and local actors in shaping shared visions and decision-making processes. Across stakeholder interviews, a strong desire for involvement emerged—yet participation is often symbolic, episodic, or informal. Several actors noted that the Museum and the *Progetto Car.Me* were perceived as externally imposed: *“We weren’t really involved in the design phase. We were informed after things were already decided.”*

While civic associations and schools have engaged in co-curated activities—especially educational initiatives—the lack of structured channels for engagement prevents consistent and inclusive participation. As one stakeholder noted: *“We try to contribute, but there’s no clear process or invitation. It feels like you need to know someone inside.”*

In contrast, institutional actors expressed intentions to foster dialogue, yet often viewed participation as communication or consultation, rather than co-decision-making.

Collaborative Innovation

The second mechanism of CWC—collaborative innovation—refers to the capacity of different stakeholders to co-create new approaches, services, or solutions through joint experimentation. There are clear examples of creative experimentation in Celio:

- Coopculture’s storytelling projects and immersive heritage tours;
- A local coworking space organized cultural events to connect creative workers with residents;

- The Forma Urbis Museum's *"A piedi scalzi nella città"* project, fostering sensory education and territorial identity among local youth.

These examples embody the second CWC mechanism—collaborative innovation—demonstrating that diverse logics (public, civic, entrepreneurial) can co-create new cultural meanings and services. However, these innovations remain disconnected from one another and from a broader strategic framework. As noted during coordination meetings: *"Each initiative is valuable, but they don't speak to each other. There's no structure tying them into a larger plan."*

Resource Mobilization

The third mechanism—resource mobilization—is, perhaps, where the fragility of the Celio civic ecosystem is most evident. Resource mobilization involves aligning tangible and intangible resources—funding, knowledge, time, networks—for collective benefit. The neighborhood is rich in institutions, in historical density, in symbolic capital but in practice the Celio context reveals abundant but underutilized resources:

- The Forma Urbis Museum structure is architecturally and symbolically powerful, but still lacks full public accessibility and spatial equipment (e.g., conference rooms, but it will be realized in the future);
- The economic actors in the district are weak, with traditional crafts disappearing and most commercial activity oriented toward tourism rather than civic engagement.

As noted in internal evaluations: *"There are resources, but they're not mobilized collaboratively. Everyone works in parallel."*

Discussion & Conclusion

The case of Celio, as analysed through the lens of CWC, provides an instructive example of both the potential and the fragility of heritage-led urban regeneration in overtouristed historic city centres. Despite the presence of dynamic civic actors and institutional commitment, the findings point to a fragmented landscape of engagement.

Role of Public Institutions

The Public Administration (PA) and the Rome Superintendency play central but distinct roles in the regeneration of Celio. The Superintendency is primarily tasked with the safeguarding, restoration, and promotion of CH. Its operations are deeply rooted in conservation logic, with a workforce of specialized professionals selected for their expertise. This institutional culture emphasizes protection and educational initiatives but places limited focus on fostering collaborative networks with civic actors or local organizations. However, officials from the Superintendency involved in the Museum of Forma Urbis expressed a clear desire to evolve toward greater community integration, stating: *"We would like to become a point of reference for the neighborhood and to open up to the citizens. These are ambitious goals, only partially achieved"*. This signals an important cultural shift—albeit still in progress—toward recognizing the museum not only as a heritage institution but as a potential civic anchor within the district.

Conversely, the PA, particularly through the leadership of the *Progetto Car.Me*, adopts a more explicitly civic-facing agenda. The project envisions a new public space open to surrounding neighborhoods and integrated into a broader urban strategy, including soft mobility and improved accessibility for residents. Through *Progetto Car.Me*, as one planner described, the PA intends to reopen the city to its citizens—those overwhelmed by dominant tourist flows in which monumental areas tend to become standardized in style and consumption, losing alternative cultural and economic opportunities, and eventually becoming less interesting for both residents and travelers. As such, the best tourism policy is not the one focused on tourists, but the one directed toward citizens. To succeed in this vision, the participation and empowerment of local communities must be placed at the center of urban policy. This requires not only structured engagement processes but also continuous evaluation of socio-economic impacts, adaptive governance frameworks, and the development of innovative management models. Without these, even the most well-intentioned public projects risk reinforcing existing fragmentations rather than enabling genuine civic wealth creation.

Lack of "Humus" for CWC Collaboration – A Fragmented Context

The process of CWC in Celio is not absent, but rather stuck in an embryonic and fragmented stage. The three mechanisms (participation, collaborative innovation, and resource mobilization) exist as potential elements distributed among different actors, but they do not come together into an integrated system. What is missing is orchestration: a process, a subject, or a platform capable of building a shared vision and operational connections. This aligns with Biondi et al. (2020), who emphasize the orchestrator's critical role in shaping and enabling the dynamics of participation and interaction among citizens and stakeholders within the socio-cultural fabric of heritage-led regeneration projects. Without such orchestration, each actor operates based on their own values, goals, and capacities, often in parallel rather than in collaboration. The transformation of these individual visions into a shared civic

agenda remains unrealized. As Della Lucia and Trunfio (2018) point out: *“In the creation of a shared vision of urban development, the greatest challenge is to overcome the significant barriers that inevitably arise when a wide variety of stakeholders are involved, all with different backgrounds, power agendas, aims, roles, and competencies.”*

The Missing Narrative: Storytelling as a Catalyst for Collective Action

A critical, yet underutilized, dimension of the Celio regeneration process is the absence of a shared narrative that connects the diverse actors, initiatives, and visions involved. While CWC relies on participation, innovation, and mobilization, these mechanisms require not only coordination but also meaning—and storytelling is a key vehicle for that. Historically dismissed as a simplistic or purely rhetorical device, storytelling has, since the 1990s, gained recognition as a powerful tool for complex environments (Salmon, 2008). Recent research in the humanities underscores storytelling's role as a cultural adaptation (Boyd, 2009). It offers stakeholders a way to articulate shared values, navigate complexity, and construct collective narratives that can guide long-term urban and cultural strategies.

A particularly salient insight from the study is the unexploited power of narrative and storytelling as instruments of orchestration and civic connection. As Biondi et al. (2020) argues, storytelling is not a mere communication device, but a social technology capable of translating complex planning agendas into accessible, emotionally resonant forms. It can enable heterogeneous actors—residents, institutions, entrepreneurs—to construct a shared sense of place and purpose. In Celio, the absence of a unifying narrative is felt. Initiatives are valued but disconnected, and the project lacks a recognizable identity that can be collectively owned. Establishing a participatory storytelling strategy—through tools such as community dossiers, narrative mapping, or public memory platforms—could significantly enhance civic engagement and support the emergence of a common urban vision. Final remarks reinforce this point: today, it is neither desirable nor feasible to carry out urban regeneration without meaningful community participation. There are significant opportunities for local administrations and communities willing to take this step and to explore new collaborative models. Storytelling now holds renewed significance, the issue is no longer whether to tell stories, but how to integrate them into a coherent, democratic, and actionable urban project.

In conclusion, the case of Celio highlights the urgent need to rethink heritage governance as a relational and participatory process rather than a purely institutional mandate. While the foundations for CWC are present, they remain underutilized due to fragmented coordination, limited engagement infrastructure, and the absence of a shared narrative. For historic urban centers facing the pressures of overtourism, the real challenge lies not in preserving monuments, but in restoring the civic fabric that gives them meaning. Placing communities at the heart of regeneration, supported by inclusive

governance and strategic storytelling, is essential for transforming cultural heritage into a driver of well-being, identity, and sustainable urban futures.

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Cultural Initiatives for Sustainable Development and Social Regeneration: A Case Study of *riGenerazione Futuro* Using the UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators

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ABSTRACT

The research is grounded in the theoretical perspective of cultural sustainability as an integral pillar of sustainable development, emphasizing the transformative role of culture in fostering social cohesion, inclusion, and well-being. Particularly, this paper investigates the challenges and opportunities associated with using cultural initiatives for sustainable social development and regeneration in peripheral areas. The research methodology combines a case study approach with mixed-method techniques. It adopts the *UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators* as both an evaluative and conceptual framework to analyze the multidimensional impacts of cultural initiatives, by focusing on the project *riGenerazione Futuro*.

The project is based on a matchfunding scheme involving a crowdfunding platform, a major Italian corporation and a cultural association, aimed to promote cultural-based regeneration and social inclusion projects in two Italian regions, Calabria and Sicily. A customized questionnaire was administered to project stakeholders, alongside semi-structured interviews. This research contributes to the broader discussion on cultural sustainability by providing empirical evidence from a real-world initiative and suggesting pathways for improving impact evaluation practices in the cultural and creative industries.

Keywords:

Cultural sustainability, Social regeneration, Community well-being, Impact evaluation, UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the representatives of the projects who participated in the research interviews, and Associazione Civita for providing the project monitoring data.

Introduction

In recent years, the intersection between culture and sustainable development has gained increasing attention in both academic literature and international policy discourse. Throsby (1995; 2010; 2018) was among the first to define the concept of cultural sustainable development, framing culture as a set of practices that can both influence socio-economic dynamics and hold intrinsic value as an independent developmental goal. Building on this foundation, subsequent scholarship has explored different shades of interaction between culture and sustainability (Borin, 2023). This evolving perspective has also informed global policy agendas (OECD 2023; UNESCO, 2024). Cultural initiatives are increasingly being recognized for their capacity to foster social regeneration, activate community engagement, and promote inclusive forms of territorial development. However, despite these growing expectations, cultural organizations often struggle to evaluate and communicate their impact in sustainability terms, largely due to the lack of appropriate measurement tools and frameworks tailored to their specific context (Vermeulen and Maas, 2020; Borin, 2023).

While theoretical frameworks and policy documents, such as the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators*, have marked important steps forward, these tools are often designed for application at national, regional or city-scale governance levels and may lack the flexibility required to assess small-scale, community-driven cultural initiatives. Furthermore, the absence of universally accepted, sector-specific evaluation models limits both the visibility and strategic potential of cultural projects in sustainability discourse. In particular, to our knowledge, research applying these frameworks to grassroots cultural actions operating in peripheral or disadvantaged areas is still limited and more investigation is therefore needed into these contexts where the transformative potential of culture is most needed yet least studied.

To address this gap, this study investigates the following research questions:

RQ1: How can cultural initiatives foster social regeneration and sustainability in peripheral areas?

RQ2: Are the UNESCO 2030 Indicators suitable as a tool to measure the impact of these cultural initiatives?

RQ3: How does the application of the UNESCO 2030 Indicators framework to this case advance knowledge related to the development of evaluative frameworks for reporting on the sustainability impact of cultural initiatives?

The paper focuses on the case study of *riGenerazione Futuro*, a cultural co-financing initiative launched in 2023 to promote culture-led regeneration in Calabria and Sicily (Italy), two regions marked by long-standing structural vulnerabilities. Through a qualitative case study approach (Otley, 1999; Scapens, 1990; Yin, 2009), the paper explores how this initiative integrates participatory governance, financial innovation, and cultural value creation. By interpreting the findings through the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators*, the study not only assesses the suitability of this framework for

small-scale initiatives but also reflects on the broader implications for sustainability reporting in the cultural sector. The analysis is grounded in stakeholder engagement theory, which emphasizes the importance of value co-creation, accountability, and dialogue in processes of sustainable development (Freeman, 1984; Kujala et al., 2022; Giordino, et al., 2024).

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study; Section 3 outlines the research design and methodology; Section 4 discusses the research results; finally, Section 5 offers concluding reflections and implications.

Theoretical framework

In recent years, both academic literature and policy discourse have increasingly acknowledged the role of culture within the framework of sustainable development. The first to introduce the notion of "cultural sustainable development" was Throsby (1995; 2010; 2018), who conceptualized culture as a set of practices that can simultaneously contribute to support or constrain economic and social development, while also affirming the independent value of cultural development as a goal in its own right. From this theory, some scholars began to investigate how culture and creativity intersect with the three traditional dimensions of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) (Duxbury et al., 2017; Worts, 2006); whereas other research consider cultural dimension as a fourth pillar (Adams, 2010; Loach et al., 2017; UCLG, 2010). In line with the first trend mentioned, scholars and advocacy organizations identified culture as a transversal theme in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, potentially contributing to relevant SDGs, although culture (and specifically cultural heritage) is explicitly mentioned just in SDG 11 (Target 11.4). . This approach promotes a holistic understanding of sustainability that transcends sectoral boundaries (Yildirim et al., 2019; Borin and Donato, 2022).

To conceptualize the multifaceted relationship between culture and sustainability, Soini and Dessein (2016) proposed three possible interpretation of cultural sustainable development: *culture in*, *culture for*, and *culture as* sustainable development (Soini and Dessein, 2016). *Culture in sustainability* advocates for the recognition of culture as an autonomous and co-equal fourth pillar, alongside the economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Loach et al., 2017; UCLG, 2010); *culture for sustainability* presents culture as an instrumental and enabling force, capable of mediating and facilitating the achievement of other sustainability objectives, particularly through the work of cultural organizations acting as connectors across different sectors (CAE, 2019); *culture as sustainable development*, proposes that culture constitutes the very foundation upon which sustainable development must be built (Soini and Dessein, 2016).

A crucial aspect of exploring the relationship between culture and sustainability involves assessing the impact of their intersection. Cultural participation has been linked to a range of positive social outcomes that contribute meaningfully to processes of social change and development (Moayerian, McGehee, & Stephenson, 2022). However, there remains a significant need for new frameworks and robust evaluation methodologies capable of capturing these contributions. Cultural organizations, in particular, are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate their legitimacy and accountability through evidence of impact.

This imperative extends beyond accountability; it is also essential for strategic performance management and long-term planning. Yet, many cultural organizations encounter difficulties in evaluating their social impact, primarily due to a lack of expertise and the absence of clear, accessible guidelines (Vermeulen and Maas, 2020). Although the recent efforts for including culture in sustainability reporting to highlight the impact of cultural and creative organizations, measuring and reporting remain challenging due to two key issues: the limited recognition of culture's role in sustainable development and the lack of suitable, sector-specific reporting standards (Borin, 2023). Cultural and creative sectors have addressed sustainability reporting challenges in two ways: by adapting to existing frameworks (e.g., GRI, <IR>) and by developing sector-specific guidelines (Adams, 2010; ICOM and OECD, 2019).

The first approach encouraged greater compliance with general standards (Julie's Bicycle, 2017; Nocca, 2017; Pencarelli et al., 2016), but also highlighted their inadequacy. The second introduced tailored models based on cultural sustainability (Marchiori et al., 2024; Pop and Borza, 2016; Pop et al., 2019; Throsby, 1995, 2010), yet lacked international recognition, reducing comparability and visibility in broader sustainability assessments.

Recent academic and policy developments have begun to outline promising directions for improving sustainability measurement in the cultural sector. For instance, Cerquetti and Montella (2021) highlight the importance of embedding social and economic inclusion into museum management as key dimensions of sustainability. At a broader policy level, the OECD (2023) has explored the local effects of major cultural, sporting, and business events, suggesting that there is growing potential for place-based approaches to impact measurement in cultural policy.

To build on this momentum, further refinement of impact measurement tools is still needed. Vermeulen and Maas (2020) advocate for the creation of frameworks specifically tailored to assess cultural impact, while Vermeulen et al. (2019) suggest that cultural organizations might adapt evaluation models from the nonprofit and social enterprise sectors, domains where the measurement of intangible outcomes is more advanced. If suitably adjusted, these approaches could offer cultural institutions robust and context-sensitive tools for articulating their contributions to sustainability.

An important advancement in this direction is represented by the already-mentioned *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* (UNESCO, 2024), which aim to integrate culture within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. While these indicators currently serve better at national or urban levels than at the level of individual cultural institutions, they nonetheless signal a shift toward recognizing culture as an essential component of sustainable development.

The *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* framework is organized into four thematic dimensions, Environment and Resilience; Prosperity and Livelihoods; Knowledge and Skills; and Inclusion and Participation, which roughly correspond to the environmental, economic, and social pillars of sustainability. Within this structure, 22 qualitative and quantitative indicators are designed to be flexible and scalable, allowing their application across different territorial contexts, from national governments to city-level administrations. The *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* pursue six interrelated objectives, as also outlined in UNESCO's institutional framework: make culture visible; provide a thematic overview; build messages and advocacy; inform national and local policies and actions; understand trends and build knowledge; monitor global progress of culture in the SDGs. It thus complements the global SDG indicator system and enhances UNESCO's ability to report within UN-wide monitoring frameworks.

Sustainability reporting practices do not stem solely from practical or regulatory imperatives, but are also grounded in a robust theoretical framework, particularly in stakeholder theory. Indeed, sustainability reporting has emerged also as a response to stakeholders' increasing demands for transparency on social and environmental issues (Borin, 2023). This theoretical foundation is firmly rooted in stakeholder theory, which posits that the primary objective of a firm is to create value for its stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder engagement theory further advances this perspective by emphasizing the reciprocal commitment between firms and their stakeholders in value creation (Giordino et al., 2024; Loureiro et al., 2020).

Nearly half of the existing literature adopts a comprehensive definition of stakeholder engagement that incorporates a moral dimension, based on voluntary and reciprocal relationships that reflect the moral agency of business actions (Ghodsvalli et al., 2019; Kujala et al., 2022); a strategic dimension, focused on stakeholders' active participation in cooperative activities aimed at generating economic value (Kujala et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2020), and a pragmatic dimension, which emphasizes the outcome-oriented nature of stakeholder engagement (Freeman et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

The application of the UNESCO framework can thus be interpreted as a mechanism for stakeholder engagement and accountability, providing a shared language and structure for evaluating impact in terms of cultural, social, and environmental sustainability (Mitchell et al., 2022).

Research Design and Methodology

The Case Approach

This study adopts an embedded qualitative case study design to explore how small- and micro-scale cultural initiatives contribute to sustainable development within peripheral or disadvantaged contexts. The choice of a case study method is justified by the exploratory nature of our research scope and aim (Otley, 1999; Scapens, 1990; Yin, 2009). Additionally, case studies are particularly well suited to contexts where complex social processes involve a vast array of stakeholders and settings (Boruchowitch and Fritz, 2022). As noted by Yin (2009), the case study method enables the empirical investigation of contemporary phenomena within their contextual settings.

The selected case study of *riGenerazione Futuro* provides a valuable empirical site for investigating questions of cultural value creation, participatory governance, and sustainability endeavours. The selected initiative involves multiple actors from different organizational and geographical contexts, thereby providing an interesting outlook at various socio-economic issues and the role of cultural initiatives.

Unit of Analysis

riGenerazione Futuro is a cultural co-financing initiative launched in 2023 as a partnership between three main entities, namely an association (Associazione Civita), a large private company (Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane), and a crowdfunding platform (Produzioni dal Basso) (Table 1). The project's overall structure integrates private capital and community engagement practices with the objective of generating value across the economic, social, and environmental pillars (Elkington, 1997, 1998). The initiative involved the partial financing of proposals from non-profit organizations operating in Calabria and Sicily (Italy). The shortlisted six projects had to adhere to a match funding model where each project had to raise at least 40% of its budget via crowdfunding before accessing the remaining 60% from the sponsoring organizations. The shortlisted projects address diverse aspects of cultural regeneration, heritage valorization, inclusive education, accessibility to the arts, and civic participation.

Data Collection

Considering the aim and methodological approach of this body of work, we employed a qualitative data collection strategy. Insights were gathered through a combination of semi-structured interviews and project reports. The above-mentioned interviews were conducted with representatives from the implementing organizations. Interviews were designed to elicit narratives about project design, implementation challenges, stakeholder engagement, and perceived impacts. Complementary data were obtained from publicly available campaign pages and from internal monitoring reports shared by the various organizations involved.

All interviewees provided informed consent. Organizational anonymity was not required in this study, as the participating entities had already disclosed their involvement through public crowdfunding campaigns.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analysed through the following framework. The first phase involved a thematic analysis of interview transcripts, informed by a grounded theory approach that emphasized inductive coding and constant comparison (Gioia et al., 2013). Initial codes were developed independently by two researchers and refined through iterative discussion. Themes were grouped around key constructs derived from the research questions.

The second phase involved aligning the empirical findings with the four dimensions of the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators*. This deductive approach helped to structure the interpretation of the obtained findings in a manner that is consistent with internationally recognised frameworks.

Additionally, we employed data triangulation as part of our analytical strategy (McLaren et al., 2016). Findings from interviews were cross-validated with campaign data and reports. Where discrepancies emerged, follow-up clarifications were sought. This process aimed to enhance construct validity and ensure robustness.

Research results: analysis of the context, implementation and measurement

Contextual Focus: riGenerazione Futuro Case Study

riGenerazione Futuro represents a project in cultural regeneration and territorial sustainability focusing on an inclusive, co-financed model. This initiative took place through financing of specific projects in Calabria and Sicily, Southern Italian regions that have been recently at the centre of governmental initiatives to finance and promote development.. The foregoing regions are indeed characterized by structural economic vulnerabilities, high rates of unemployment, significant migration from their youth population, and limited investments (Albertus, 2023; Asso, 2023; EUNews, 2024). The above-mentioned conditions have long inhibited the emergence of resilient cultural ecosystems and the effective participation of local communities in sustainable development processes.

In light of the contextual difficulties traditionally associated with Calabria and Sicily, *riGenerazione Futuro* was launched in 2023 as a partnership among three stakeholders, as explained above: Associazione Civita (AC), Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FS) and Produzioni dal Basso (PB) (Table 1).

	Associazione Civita	Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane	Produzioni dal Basso
Headquarter	Rome, Italy	Rome, Italy	Milan, Italy
Description	Association active in the cultural sphere, promoting cultural collaborations between private companies, cultural organizations and public-authorities	State-owned corporation managing trains and train lines in various European countries.	Italian digital platform specialized in crowdfunding.

TABLE 1. CONTEXTUAL DETAILS CONCERNING RIGENERAZIONE FUTURO LAUNCHING PARTNERS

Source: own elaboration

These actors co-designed a match-funding model that combined grassroots fundraising with institutional support. Specifically, organizations from the third sector were invited to propose cultural and creative projects whose aim and scope were to generate value across the three dimensions of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997, 1998) in Calabria and Sicily. Shortlisted projects were required to raise at least 40% of their budget through crowdfunding campaigns hosted on PB digital platform. Upon reaching the foregoing threshold, FS contributed the remaining 60% as a reward-based co-financing mechanism.

The shortlisted projects had to direct their focus toward cultural regeneration, community engagement, and the inclusion of marginalized groups, thereby tackling the social and economic challenges present within Calabria and Sicily regions (Albertus, 2023; Asso, 2023; EUNews, 2024). The selected projects' aims ranged from intangible assets concerning local heritage to ameliorating the accessibility of artistic practices to tackle issues of creative illiteracy, to promoting active citizenship, cultural entrepreneurship and social inclusion and reintegration. In total, six projects won the selection, three located in the Calabria region and three in the Sicily region, as illustrated in table 2 below.

Region	Project title	Promoters	Topic
Calabria	Guardiani della Memoria: Storie silenziose di una Calabria dimenticata	Associazione culturale Mystery Hunters di Cosenza	A project aimed at creating documentaries and initiatives that preserve memory and encourage awareness of the hidden and lesser-known heritage of Calabria.
Calabria	TOUCH ME!	Associazione Wake Up ETS	A project making the urban artworks of the MUDIAC museum in Catanzaro accessible also to people with visual impairments and reduced mobility, through their 3D reproduction
Calabria	"#trameascuola Costruiamo un futuro libero dalle mafie!"	Fondazione Trame ETS	A cycle of educational and cultural activities, including workshops in schools, meetings with authors, and public readings, to raise awareness among young people about the principles of legality and the fight against the mafia, promoting the values of civic responsibility and justice

Sicily	Your TRIP in MY Shoes In viaggio oltre i limiti del pregiudizio	Cooperativa Sociale Al Revès	A project for the empowerment and social and cultural inclusion of people with physical disabilities or in situations of social hardship, through storytelling and artistic workshops.
Sicily	CraftEolie - Coltivare le tradizioni, plasmare il futuro	Associazione Amaneï	A project to rediscover and enhance traditional arts and crafts of the Aeolian Islands in a modern way.
Sicily	Young Putia - Sicily and Sicilians 3.0	Associazione culturale MostraMed	A project aiming at the creation of a community art workshop to promote young Sicilian talents and enhance local traditions

TABLE 2 - OVERVIEW OF THE RIGENERAZIONE FUTURO SELECTED PROJECTS

Source: own elaboration

The novelty attributable to *riGenerazione Futuro* stems from the collaborative and inclusive design underpinning both its governance and operational structure. First, local stakeholders were not treated as passive beneficiaries, but rather as active co-producers of value that had to directly partake in the funding, design and implementation phases of the projects (Mariani et al., 2022; Maziliauske, 2024). Second, the crowdfunding campaigns functioned not only as financial tools but as civic platforms that enabled storytelling, trust-building, and constituency formation (Logue and Grimes, 2022; Soltani Delgosha et al., 2024).

AC acted as a mediator, thereby facilitating the dialogic process between corporations, local communities, organizations and numerous stakeholders, thus fostering cross-sectoral synergies and ensuring cultural and contextual relevance of the shortlisted projects.

This case study structure underscores the paradigmatic case of how cultural initiatives can serve as both enablers and drivers of inclusive, sustainable development in territories which are often marginalized from mainstream innovation, policy frameworks and financing programmes (Aman et al., 2022; Catalfo et al., 2021; Mereghetti and Baraldi, 2025). Additionally, it underscores the financial innovation attributable to cultural initiatives, emphasizing systemic collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

Interpreting the Obtained Findings through the UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators Framework

To further contextualize the obtained insights, we adopted the UNESCO thematic indicators for Culture of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2024) as guiding tools. In doing so, we were able to underscore the small scale of the investigated initiatives while retaining the thematic dimensions of I. environment and resilience; II. economic well-being, III. knowledge and skills, and; IV. inclusion and participation.

Environmental and Resilience

riGenerazione underscores the potential of culture to enhance local livability, particularly in peripheral and depopulated contexts. Specifically, 41 spaces, both public and private, were activated for cultural use, with significant participation from local municipalities characterized by infrastructural and demographic challenges. For instance, “*CraftEolie - Coltivare le tradizioni, plasmare il futuro*” revitalized dormant public venues located in Santa Marina Salina (Sicily) during off-peak tourist seasons, thereby supporting their focus on artistic production and social exchange.

Overall, it is estimated that the supported initiatives reached about 600.000 individuals, tourists and residents alike, thus underscoring the cultural ripple effect of small scale initiatives (Bloom, 2021; Hornsey et al, 2021).

Economic Well-Being

Although small in absolute value, the selected initiative mobilized over €63.000 in funding, including €27.200 from more than 300 individual donors and €36.000 in match-funding. Beyond its nominal monetary value, the adopted approach nurtured local economies by supporting micro-enterprises, artisans, and cultural practitioners. Projects such as “*Putia Lab - Sicily and Sicilians 3.0*” and “*CraftEolie - Coltivare le tradizioni, plasmare il futuro*” offered new avenues for creative entrepreneurs and cultural organizations to partake in the local development. From some of the semi-structured interviews, it emerged that the projects ameliorated their capacity to access other funding opportunities and construct cross-sectoral networks and partnerships (Baum and Silverman, 2004).

Knowledge and Skills

Several projects integrated educational elements into their activities. These activities were aimed at building cultural competencies and civic awareness. For instance, “*#trameascuola - Costruiamo un futuro libero dalle mafie*” engaged with children through structured reading and dialogue activities centered on the themes of legality and anti-mafia culture. Similarly, “*Your TRIP in MY Shoes - In viaggio oltre i limiti del pregiudizio*” employed storytelling and performance art to raise awareness and understanding among youth and incarcerated individuals, diminishing the divide between artistic endeavours and social pedagogy. The above mentioned initiatives nurtured knowledge transmission and personal empowerment, especially for individuals belonging to socially marginalized groups (Aureli and Del Baldo, 2023; Dameri and Demartini, 2020).

Inclusion and Participation

All six financed initiatives were characterized by their strong commitment to accessibility and community engagement. Approximately 4.600 individuals took part in projects activities, with 76% under the age of 18 and 7% identified as having disabilities. Among these initiatives, “*Touch Me!*” stands out given its production of tactile art installations for the visually impaired. The tactile installations were made by socially disadvantaged youth, thereby redefining both the meaning of cultural accessibility and the boundaries of audience participation. The above-mentioned approach challenged conventional distinctions between cultural consumers and producers, thus reaffirming culture’s capacity to serve as a vehicle for social equity and cohesion (Jenson, 2002; Stead, 2017).

Structural and Methodological Challenges to the Assessment of Cultural Initiatives: riGenerazione Futuro Case Study

Despite the selected case study outcomes in terms of local engagement, we were able to gather empirical evidence suggesting several challenges that emerged throughout the *riGenerazione* case study. First, the project underscores the issues attributable to scalability and sustainability of cultural initiatives that rely on temporary funding and volunteer labor. Indeed, while the match-funding model gained traction in supporting the mobilization of initial capital, the overall long-term viability of the activated spaces and services was questioned once the institutional support diminished (Stevens and Peikes, 2006). This issue was

particularly salient in territories where public cultural infrastructure remains underdeveloped or fragmented. Second, the project underscores the difficulties attributable to measuring and capturing intangible cultural and social outcomes within the existing measurement frameworks and scorecards (El Faouri and Sibley, 2024; Vondolina, 2022; York et al., 2021). For instance, while the UNESCO indicators offer valuable guidance, project leaders noted that the lived experiences of empowerment, identity reformation, or social trust were not always easily quantifiable. Specifically, the complexity of these transformations requires flexible evaluative scorecards and approaches that can accommodate qualitative dimensions and context-sensitive indicators.

Nonetheless, through the UNESCO Culture|2030 indicators, we were able to adhere to an internationally recognized framework to assess the projects' impact across numerous dimensions and pillars (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). The *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* provided a robust and internationally recognized framework to assess cultural impact across multiple dimensions. Its overall structure provides an integrated perspective on the environmental, economic, educational, and social factors necessary to understand the overall impact of the investigated projects. However, the overall structure and narrative of some pillars within the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* proves challenging when exploring micro- and small-scale initiatives. Specifically, some indicators are designed for national and municipal governance contexts, thus often requiring adaptation to fit the granularity and specificity of community-based contexts. This led to a need for significant interpretive work on the part of the evaluators. Furthermore, the framework's emphasis on formalized cultural institutions and standardized metrics occasionally clashed with the fluid, experimental, and emergent nature of grassroots cultural practices.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on cultural sustainability by offering an empirical investigation into the role of cultural initiatives in fostering sustainable development and social regeneration within the contextual focus of peripheral contexts. Through *riGenerazione Futuro*, this body of research provides a nuanced response to its three RQs. Firstly, it confirms that cultural initiatives, when designed through participatory governance and collaborative funding mechanisms, can actively support regeneration in marginalized territories (Baum and Silverman, 2004; Bloom, 2021; Hornsey et al, 2021). Secondly, while the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators* proved helpful in capturing multi-

dimensional impacts, their application to small-scale projects highlighted structural and methodological challenges (Jenson, 2002; Stead, 2017). Finally, the use of this framework has offered critical insights into how evaluative models might be refined for grassroots cultural action. Moreover, this research underscores that even small-scale cultural projects can contribute to the sustainable transformation of disadvantaged geographical contexts. The selected case study underscored the power of co-financing and civic crowdfunding in fostering both economic participation and social inclusion. Notably, the initiative supported skill development, fostered civic awareness, and enhanced access to cultural spaces, particularly for underrepresented groups such as youth and individuals with disabilities (Aureli and Del Baldo, 2023; Dameri and Demartini, 2020). These findings highlight the significant potential of culture not only as a beneficiary of sustainable development but as a driver of its social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Stead, 2017).

From a policy and practice perspective, this study recommends a more flexible adaptation of international indicator frameworks like UNESCO's Culture|2030 to accommodate local-scale interventions (El Faouri and Sibley, 2024; Vondolina, 2022; York et al., 2021). Practitioners are encouraged to pursue multi-stakeholder governance models that treat communities as co-creators of value (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, this abstract points to the need for further exploration into measurement tools that can balance qualitative and quantitative assessments, particularly in contexts where intangible outcomes are central (El Faouri and Sibley, 2024; Vondolina, 2022; York et al., 2021). Nonetheless, this body of work is not without limitations. The single case design constrains the generalizability of findings, and the relatively short timeline limits the assessment of long-term impacts (Otley, 1999; Scapens, 1990; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported and project-provided data may introduce bias (Gioia et al., 2013; McLaren et al., 2016). Future research should pursue longitudinal and comparative studies to validate and extend these insights. Additional investigation is also needed to develop flexible, context-sensitive evaluative models that maintain methodological rigor while accounting for the unique dynamics of community-driven cultural initiatives.

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Traditional Commerce in Porto: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Urban Development

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ABSTRACT

Traditional commerce in Porto, including historic bookshops, restaurants, jewellers, grocery stores, and drugstores plays a key role in preserving the city's cultural identity and urban heritage, yet faces growing challenges tied to sustainable development. This study investigates both opportunities and threats affecting these businesses, focusing on their role in urban sustainability, social cohesion, and heritage preservation, aligned with SDG 11 of the UN Agenda 2030. Specific goals include analysing pressures from touristification, gentrification, and digitalisation, and understanding local perceptions of traditional commerce. The research is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with shopkeepers and customers, complemented by policy analysis. Initial results highlight traditional commerce as vital for Porto's resilience, identity, and sustainable urban development. Findings aim to support heritage-based urban strategies and offer practical policy recommendations.

Keywords:

Traditional commerce;
Sustainable development;
Urban heritage;
Community resilience; Cultural identity

Introduction

Porto's historic city centre, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1996, has transformed into a popular destination. The city won multiple "European Best Destination" awards and saw tourism arise

intensely (Fernandes et al, 2024: 100). For example, annual overnight stays jumped from about 2.1 million in 2013 to 4.8 million in 2022, a 129% increase. By 2018, Porto even hosted 6170 Airbnb listings per 100000 residents, a density exceeding Paris and Barcelona (Fernandes et al, 2021: 76). This boom injected new energy into the once-declining downtown. Many derelict buildings were renovated and local retailers reported a “new life” in the city centre thanks to tourist spending. At the same time, however, experts began voicing concern that Porto might be suffering from over tourism, with too much visitors for the city to sustain without harming its character and liveability. The influx of tourists, alongside real estate speculation (fuelled in part by Portugal’s former “golden visa” program for foreign investors) has profoundly altered the physical and social fabric of Porto’s old town (Jiang, 2025: 5). This introduction outlines this dilemma: tourism has brought economic revitalization, yet it also poses a threat to the traditional commerce and communities that give Porto its soul. The chapters below examine how excessive tourism pressure endangers Porto’s historic shops, what impacts were observed especially between 2019 and 2025 and what support measures and policies might reconcile tourist growth with the survival of traditional local businesses in the near future. To this end, this work will begin with a literature review, followed by the presentation of the methodology used and selected case studies, culminating with the analysis and discussion of the results obtained and respective conclusions.

Literature review

Urban sustainability, social cohesion and heritage conservation under the context of SDG11

After Porto’s historic centre was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996, the city experienced surging tourism and real estate speculation, leading to interventions in its urban space (Jiang, 2025). However, these trends have brought serious challenges for sustainable urban development. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) calls for cities to be “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” and its Target 11.4 urges strengthening efforts to safeguard Cultural Heritage (Ramazanova, Silva and Vaz de Freitas, 2024) In Porto, balancing tourism growth with social cohesion and heritage conservation has proven difficult. Tourism became “*the main engine of transformation*” in Porto’s city centre during the 2010s (Fernandes et al, 2024:78). The number of short-term rental apartments exploded by 293% between 2010 and 2019, while traditional hotel capacity expanded by 114% (Fernandes et al, 2023). This influx spurred economic revival and building rehabilitation but also drove a “*dramatic increase in real estate prices*”, exemplified by a 44.7% affluence in property prices in the historic centre from 2019–2022 (vs 35.6% nationally). Property values and land rents climbed abruptly as demand for tourist accommodation and businesses pushed them to new heights. The rapid touristification has been accompanied by marked gentrification (Fernandes et al, 2024). Housing costs arose beyond local affordability, and by

2020 the average monthly rent for a small flat was around €1000, nearly equal to Portugal's minimum wage. Liberalization of rent laws in 2012 and a "golden visa" program for foreign investors further fuelled real estate speculation. As a result, many longtime residents were displaced, as a "floating population" of transient tourists and short-term renters replaced the local community. Remaining locals feel alienated in what has become a "*neighborhood of strangers*" (Jiang, 2025). This erosion of the resident population undermines social cohesion and runs against to SDG11's inclusivity goals. Tourism-led changes also triggered a functional turnover of commerce. Traditional family-run shops, grocers, bookshops and cafés that once served everyday local needs have struggled amid soaring rents and changing demand. Many have closed, being replaced by trendy bars, global retail chains and souvenir stores oriented toward tourists. When asking these phenomena to veteran shopkeepers they refer that tourism brought "new life" to the city centre but also "*negative effects for residents and traditional shops*" that cannot compete (Fernandes et al, 2024: 100). The retail landscape has homogenized, diluting Porto's unique character. In another way, Porto's historic centre looks like a "city of tourists" rather than a living city with tourists. At the same time, overtourism is eroding the qualities that make Porto distinctive (Vieira et al. 2023), and heritage experts note that excessive tourism is already harming the site's value as a World Heritage City. Simultaneously there is a growing recognition that urban sustainability must rebalance tourism with local needs.

In 2021, Porto joined 16 other European cities to pledge "*aligning tourism with the best practices of sustainable policies*" (Fernandes et al, 2024: 5) and scholars start planning for a "city with tourists" instead of a "city of tourists", meaning creating policies that protect residents and traditional businesses while managing tourism. The focus is meeting the aspirations of SDG11 namely, strengthening community bonds and protecting Porto's irreplaceable culture while ensuring the city remains inclusive, resilient and vibrant as it continues to welcome the world.

Tourisfication, Gentrification and Digitalization in Traditional Commerce

The period from 2019 to 2025 summarizes both the peak of Porto's tourism frenzy and the disruption brought by the pandemics. These forces have left an indelible mark on the city's traditional commerce (Saldanha, 2025). On the one hand, tourism has brought greater urban traffic and new customers to venerable stores. For example, owners of century-old establishments like *Bazar Paris* (a toy store founded in 1903) acknowledge that tourist interest in authentic local goods provided a boost in sales. On the other hand, the pressures of over tourism and gentrification have been largely detrimental to traditional commerce in Porto. The explosion of short-term rentals and tourist-oriented businesses drove up rents for commercial spaces, making it hard for small family-run shops to afford downtown locations. Many historic shops that survived for generations under older low-rent leases found themselves in peril once Portugal reformed its tenancy laws around 2012-2019 (loosening rent controls). Landlords, seeing an opportunity to charge market rates or sell properties for tourism development, often did not renew leases for traditional businesses (Fernandes et al, 2024: 5). This

trend has led to the closure of cherished establishments, from neighbourhood grocers and bakeries to bookshops, and their replacement by businesses thought to be more profitable with tourists (e.g. international coffee chains or souvenir franchises).

Significantly, when a historic shop closes, Porto loses not just an economic unit but a piece of its Cultural Heritage (Pacheco, Tavares and Madaleno, 2019). These stores often carry decades or centuries of history in their walls, products, and customer relationships. In other words, each lost shop means a loss of collective memory and identity for the city. This realization has fuelled public support in Porto for protecting local commerce against the forces of mass tourism and real estate speculation. Even tourists themselves may feel the impact without authentic bookstores, vintage grocers, or classic cafés and the visitor experience of Porto would be impoverished. The appeal of Porto lies in its unique sense of place, something that globalized retail tourist outlets cannot provide. Maintaining that distinctiveness is thus in the long-term interest of both residents and the tourism industry.

Furthermore, digitalization has been reshaping Porto's traditional retail sector. By the late 2010s, consumers increasingly expected technology-enhanced shopping experiences, and many retailers embraced online channels alongside physical stores (Ferreira et al. 2020). In Porto, the municipality launched the "Shop in Porto" platform in 2019 to promote local shops online, enrolling over a thousand businesses in its first months (Câmara Municipal do Porto, 2019). This early digital pivot proved crucial when the COVID-19 pandemic caused lockdowns and boosted e-commerce (Patrícia et al. 2023). By 2022, digitalization was widely seen as essential for the survival and competitiveness of Porto's traditional business. Nowadays, digital channels become essential in preserving and evolving Porto's traditional commerce.

Methodology and case studies

The empirical work developed below followed a qualitative methodology that used in-depth interviews with managers and customers of traditional commercial establishments. In this regard, six categories of traditional commercial establishments were defined, respectively: restaurants, grocery stores, jewelry stores, bookstores and second-hand bookstores, historic cafés, tailors, and fabric stores. The selection of the six chosen typologies was guided by their cultural and heritage relevance, historical continuity, and representativeness across different commercial types. More specifically, two store managers and four customers were interviewed per type of establishment.

Besides this, a combination of ethnographic observation and archival research was used.

The fieldwork was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, and involved direct engagement with the participants.

Concerning the semi-structured interview guide includes the following questions:

- In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges this business currently faces due to tourist pressure and increasing housing changes in the city of Porto? Can you give concrete examples?

- How do you feel the arrival of new residents and tourists has affected your business's relationship with locals? Do you consider this relationship to have changed in recent years? Why?
- How important is your establishment to preserve the identity and cultural traditions of the city of Porto? How does this importance manifest itself in daily life?
- What do you believe are the main economic and social challenges that could jeopardize the continuity of traditional businesses in your specific area (bookstore, grocery store, restaurant, etc.)?
- If you had to suggest concrete measures to the Porto City Council to protect and encourage traditional businesses, what would you propose?
- How do you see the future of traditional businesses in Porto? Do you think it's possible to reconcile modernization and sustainability with the preservation of the city's historical and cultural identity? Please explain your vision.

Rather than seeking generalisation, the aim was to foreground lived experience, local knowledge, and micro-histories that shed light on broader processes of cultural change. By adopting this bottom-up perspective, the studies contribute to current debates around sustainable urban development, heritage conservation, and the social value of traditional commerce in contemporary cities well-being.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

Analysis of Results

In each traditional commercial establishments category were used 3 or 4 examples. In other words, the examples used for each category were: restaurants (Abadia, Casa Guedes Snack-Bar and Buraquinho Cavern); grocery stores (Casa Januário, Casa Chinesa and Mercearia do Bolhão); jewelry stores (Pedro Baptista; Machado Joalheiro and Marcolino); bookstores and second-hand bookstores (Livraria Lello; Livraria Almedina; Livraria Latina; Chaminé da Mota and Académica); Historic cafés (Brasileira; Magestic, Guarany and Imperial Café) and tailors/fabric stores (Armazém dos Linhos, Armazém Cunhas and London Style Alfaiates).

At the traditional restaurants examples the participants confirm that these venues are more than food outlets, they are repositories of collective memory, social cohesion, and identity. Both in Abadia and Casa Guedes they state the entrepreneurial adaptability while retaining authenticity, a balance crucial for cultural sustainability. On the other hand, in O Buraquinho tavern they underline the precariousness of traditional commerce in the face of real estate speculation and gentrification, issues central to the discourse on sustainable urban futures. All of them show how small, local enterprises can act as both victims and agents in the ongoing redefinition of urban identity in Porto.

Concerning groceries, the participants emphasize the importance of local identity and heritage preservation in a rapidly transforming urban landscape. These stores not only retain historical and architectural significance but also express the intangible heritage through generational knowledge,

traditional practices, and customer relationships. Their integration into programs like “Porto de Tradição” reveals institutional recognition of their cultural value, reinforcing their role in sustainable urban development. The narrative of loss, resilience, and adaptation particularly evident in the contrast between Casa Chinesa’s evolution and Merceria do Bolhão’s closure, highlights the pressures exerted by tourism-driven gentrification. At the same time, it shows how these businesses, when adequately supported, can expand as cultural and economic anchors, fostering sustainable and culturally rooted urban regeneration.

In respect to Porto’s jewellery stores the participants confirm they support the city’s attractiveness and identity in a globalised tourism landscape. Specifically, Pedro A. Baptista, Machado Joalheiro and Marcolino production is more than retail, as it embodies a living heritage that bridges artisanal excellence with urban identity. Each of the stores reveals different strategies of adaptation to contemporary market demands, from digital engagement to sustainable practices, while safeguarding their legacies through intergenerational transmission and location in architecturally significant buildings.

Regarding bookstores and second-hand stores interviewees refer they embody key dimensions of traditional commerce as urban heritage. For them, these spaces are not only commercial sites but also repositories of memory, education, and literary heritage. Specifically, the case of Livraria Lello demonstrates how a bookstore can evolve into a global tourist attraction without abandoning its literary mission, while the narrative around the closure of Livraria Latina illustrates the vulnerability of traditional businesses under the pressure of tourism-led gentrification. The survival of Second-Hand Bookshops such as Chaminé da Mota rely, in their opinion, on adaptive resilience and the role of niche cultural markets. They highlight how traditional bookstores act as interfaces between cultural tourism and urban sustainability, making them not only as retainers of knowledge and culture but essential case studies for understanding heritage-based urban economies.

The answers obtained considering the historic cafés of Porto provides a meaningful exploration of the intersection between traditional commerce and cultural tourism in the urban fabric of the city. Once again, they talk about urban memory, architectural heritage, and economic transformation. As artistic incubators they reinforce their role as spaces of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The transformations of these spaces some now reoriented toward elite tourism or multinational commerce mirror broader tensions in urban development, such as gentrification and the commodification of heritage.

Finally, the participants identify the Tailors and Fabric Stores with living heritage, as they not only preserve architectural and artisanal legacies but also embody narratives of continuity, adaptation, and local authenticity that are increasingly valued by truly cultural tourists. They are important in urban sustainability, namely: resilience in the face of real estate speculation (Armazém dos Linhos), architectural preservation and intergenerational memory (Armazéns Cunhas), and artisanal excellence and tradition coupled with modern communication strategies (London Style).

Discussion of Results

The case studies presented in this research provide a perspective in which the tensions and potentialities of traditional commerce in Porto can be understood. The qualitative approach of the fieldwork, developed through in-depth observation and interviews, confirms what the literature review has already hinted. Shops like Bazar Paris, Casa Guedes, or Livraria Lello stand as anchors of cultural memory, embracing forms of innovation and digital platforms. The inclusion of traditional grocery stores like Casa Chinesa in heritage support programs such as “Porto de Tradição” evidences a growing institutional awareness of their social and symbolic value, as urged by SDG 11’s call for inclusive, sustainable, and culturally sensitive urban development. The closure of emblematic spaces such as Merceria do Bolhão or the O Buraquinho tavern exposes the brutal impact of speculative real estate and the liberalisation of lease contracts issues. These closures do not merely signify commercial loss, but the erosion of lived heritage and a rupture in the intergenerational continuity of local life. Another dimension strongly reinforced by the empirical findings is the pervasive impact of uncontrolled tourism expansion.

Digitalization emerges as a more ambiguous yet ultimately hopeful trend. Businesses with limited digital literacy or capital were slower to adapt and more vulnerable to closure. Others like London Style (tailor) or Armazém dos Linhos leveraged digital platforms not only to survive, but to expand their client network and reinforce their artisanal identity.

The loss of familiar stores impacts not only in the several kinds of consumers, but with the neighbourhood witnessing the disappearance of reference points in their daily routines and collective memories. This supports the argument that social cohesion and urban identity are not abstract ideals, but lived experiences materially embedded in the everyday presence of heritage commerce.

The case studies substantiate the broader theoretical claims made in the literature review meaning that traditional commerce in Porto is a key vector of sustainable urban development, intimately tied to the goals of SDG 11 and the preservation of cultural identity. The empirical data also add specificity to these claims, revealing the consequences of policy gaps, market pressures, and uneven support.

Conclusions

The paths of traditional commerce in Porto between 2019 and 2025 illustrates a complex and often uneasy coexistence between urban heritage, tourism development, and socio-economic transformation. As shown throughout this research, traditional shops are not mere relics of the past but are deeply embedded in the city’s cultural identity and everyday life. They act as vital social and economic infrastructures that carry memory, foster cohesion, and offer continuity in the face of rapid change. However, their survival is increasingly at risk due to overlapping forces: gentrification, speculative real estate markets, the aggressive tourism boom, and uneven digital adaptation.

The case studies presented, spanning bookshops, cafés, grocery stores, tailors, restaurants, pharmacies, and jewellery stores, collectively point to a paradox. On the one hand, these establishments have shown remarkable resilience. Some have embraced digital tools, engaged with heritage programs, or carved out niches in cultural tourism, allowing them to reinvent themselves while maintaining their core identity. On the other hand, this resilience is not evenly distributed. Many iconic shops have closed, unable to withstand the pressures of soaring rents, shifting consumer patterns, and policy vacuums. Their disappearance leaves more than an empty storefront as it signals a rupture in the urban narrative, weakening the city's emotional and cultural fabric.

The challenge, is not to reject tourism, but to manage it in ways that respect and preserve local life. This study reinforces the need to consider traditional shops not simply as economic actors, but as living heritage. Their protection requires tailored legislation and community-centred planning. Digital innovation can offer opportunities if accompanied by training, access, and recognition of each business's specific context and rhythm. Finally, the preservation of Porto's traditional commerce must be seen as a strategic priority for sustainable urban development, not a nostalgic luxury or a "city with tourists," instead of a "city for tourists." The future of Porto's traditional commerce will depend on the city's capacity to bridge rhetoric and reality, and to recognise that what is truly valuable is not only what attracts tourists, but what sustains and connects the people who call the city home.

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Reimagining Public Libraries as Cultural Learning Ecosystems: A Case Study of School of Life Initiative

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ABSTRACT

Once regarded as quiet repositories of knowledge, public libraries are increasingly being reimagined as participatory platforms for cultural learning, skills development, and social cohesion. This paper examines how libraries can advance cultural sustainability and support individual well-being and development by embedding non-formal education within civic infrastructure. Using School of Life initiative in Dubai as a case study, the research explores the evolving role of libraries as rhizomatic spaces for co-creation and future-ready learning. The study adopts a qualitative methodology and a hybrid theoretical framework grounded in the works of Freire, Deleuze, and the capabilities approach. The findings offer insights for rethinking public cultural policy and educational practice in a rapidly changing urban context.

Keywords:

Cultural sustainability, Non-formal education, Public libraries, Rhizomatic learning, Learning ecosystems

Introduction

Public libraries are at a pivotal moment. Rapid technological change, shifting cultural habits, and rising social division are prompting a reevaluation of their traditional role as quiet spaces for reading and research.

This paper offers a new perspective on public libraries as informal educational and cultural spaces that foster identity development, emotional growth, skill building, and collaborative knowledge creation. With a focus on inclusive design and state-of-the-art educational methods, libraries can transform into active centers for lifelong learning, civic imagination, and cultural collaboration. This aligns with global educational policy trends that increasingly value learning beyond traditional institutions.

Background and Context

The Evolving Role of Public Libraries

Historically, public libraries have been foundational to democratic access, providing free paths to knowledge and cultural resources. However, in many areas, their full potential to foster community learning and social growth remains underutilized. Today, public libraries are in a position to make a major shift from passive sources of information to inclusive, interactive spaces that contribute to community involvement, skill building, and lifelong learning. In this expanded role, libraries are not just about sharing knowledge; they also promote collaboration, support local talents, and adapt to their communities' changing needs.

Global Perspectives on Libraries as Cultural Learning Hubs

The transformation of public libraries into lively cultural learning ecosystems is a worldwide trend. For example, the Toronto Public Library's "Innovation Hubs" program provides community-driven workshops on technology, the arts, and entrepreneurship, promoting inclusive digital literacy and creative skills (Toronto Public Library, 2021). Similarly, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt hosts cultural festivals, maker spaces, and heritage preservation projects, merging ancient traditions with modern learning methods (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2020).

In Europe, the DOK Library in Ghent, Belgium, exemplifies how libraries can act as cultural commons, offering participatory programming in media arts, social innovation, and local storytelling, primarily focusing on marginalized groups (DOK, 2019). In Latin America, the Bibliotecas Parque in Medellín, Colombia, serves as community centers, providing safe spaces for artistic expression, dialogue between generations, and civic participation in neighborhoods affected by conflict (Medellín City Council, 2018).

These global examples align with the principles of the Dubai School of Life initiative, which emphasizes community collaboration, flexible learning paths, and cultural empowerment. They collectively show how libraries around the world are becoming centers for social unity, cultural sustainability, and skill development for the future.

School of Life Initiative

Launched in 2022, School of Life is a city-wide cultural education program within Dubai's public library network. An initiative of Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, it aims to promote lifelong learning through informal education models that prioritize accessibility, creativity, and community involvement. The program seeks to invigorate library spaces, turning them into cultural hubs with a rotating schedule of curated learning experiences. These experiences cover various fields, including art and design, digital technology, job readiness, language learning, and community well-being, ensuring relevance for participants of all ages and backgrounds.

Each program cycle follows a strong evidence-based approach. Community surveys, attendance data, and qualitative feedback are regularly collected to inform design choices and improve delivery methods. This data-driven approach allows the program to respond to emerging community needs while maintaining high standards of cultural and educational value. Importantly, the initiative emphasizes intergenerational and collaborative learning formats, encouraging dialogue across age groups and promoting social unity.

Since its launch, School of Life has facilitated over 2,500 educational and cultural events across Dubai's public library branches, reaching more than 30,000 participants to date. Its ecosystem is backed by over 100 strategic partnerships with government agencies, private sector innovators, universities, and independent creatives. Notable collaborators include institutions like Canon Middle East (for photography programs), Berlitz (for language teaching), LinkedIn and Career Lab (for career-focused training), and local experts who contribute to programs aligned with the UAE's national themes, such as the "Year of Sustainability" and "Year of Community." These partnerships

have allowed School of Life to continually expand its reach while adapting its offerings to the unique cultural landscape of Dubai's diverse communities.

Through its adaptive program structure and a growing network of stakeholders, School of Life shows how public libraries can be rethought as participatory infrastructures for lifelong learning, civic imagination, and cultural sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This study brings together three main areas of theory related to learning, cultural involvement, and social change.

Cultural Capabilities and Sustainability

Amartya Sen's (1999) capabilities approach, expanded by Martha Nussbaum (2011), redefines development in terms of increasing the real freedoms individuals have to lead fulfilling lives. In a cultural context, this view suggests that individuals need access to cultural resources, creative expression, and identity development to thrive.

From this perspective, libraries can act as crucial public platforms for building cultural capabilities—enabling people not just to engage with culture but also to contribute to it. Cultural sustainability becomes not just about preservation, but also about access and future participation.

Popular Education and Freire

Paulo Freire (2000) criticized the "banking model" of education, which treats learners as passive recipients of knowledge. In its place, he advocated for dialogic, co-creative processes where learners and educators engage in mutual exchange. This model emphasizes self-authorship, critical awareness, and learning as a socially embedded experience. Within public libraries, such an approach encourages the design of collaborative learning environments where diverse cultural narratives—particularly those from underrepresented communities—are acknowledged, explored, and valued.

Central to Freire's pedagogy is the concept of *conscientização*, or critical consciousness—the ability to recognize and challenge social, political, and economic injustices. When applied to libraries, this

principle positions them not only as places of access to information, but as spaces for reflection, dialogue, and empowerment. Rather than simply disseminating knowledge, libraries become active forums where individuals interrogate dominant narratives, connect personal experiences to broader structures, and participate in shaping more just and inclusive futures.

Rhizomatic Learning and Deleuze

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) rhizome concept provides a compelling way to rethink knowledge systems. Unlike hierarchical or linear models, the rhizome is decentralized, multidirectional, and expansive. Learning in this framework is about becoming—non-linear, emergent, and driven by curiosity.

Viewing libraries as rhizomatic spaces encourages an understanding of them as places where users create their own paths rather than following set routes. Knowledge is seen as fragmented yet interconnected, and cultural expression is viewed as fluid rather than fixed.

Spatial Theory

Lefebvre's idea that space is socially created—made up of conceived, perceived, and lived spaces—helps us see libraries not only as physical places but also as cultural landscapes shaped by policy, participation, and memory. This analysis reveals how libraries can transform into third places—neutral zones where people come together and engage in cultural activities.

Findings and Discussion

Aspirational Becoming

School of Life learners report increased confidence, social interaction, and personal growth through post-events surveys. Indeed, many programs encourage learners to develop community solutions, such as environmental initiatives or heritage documentation projects. Workshops that focused on storytelling, poetry, and heritage preservation have deepened participants' sense of identity and belonging. Hence, learners view the library as a safe and inspiring environment for emotional exploration and dialogue across generations.

The transformation experienced by learners through School of Life extended beyond the local context. A defining moment occurred when a group of participants represented the UAE at an international Science competition in Beijing. Among them was Amin Wahaby, who shared:

“When they called out UAE, I couldn’t believe it at first. All those late nights, all the failed prototypes, all the revisions—everything was worth it in that moment.”

The team’s silver medal achievement among thousands of entries worldwide was not only an innovation victory but also a testament to the emerging identities and goals fostered by the program. Their projects included:

- An AI-powered drone system for quick victim detection in natural disasters
- A smart irrigation and filtration system for sustainable precision agriculture
- An AI-driven waste sorting bin for effective waste management

These projects did not originate in laboratories or elite institutions; they stemmed from library-based learning environments where young people were encouraged to explore, fail, and improve. Their success illustrates the library as more than a place for knowledge access; it becomes a birthplace of future possibilities, where global skills and civic imagination develop.

This moment of international recognition illustrates the idea of aspirational becoming—where learners are empowered to envision futures and confidently pursue them.

Designing for Cultural Participation

To fully harness the potential of libraries as dynamic cultural ecosystems, public policy needs to shift from transactional service delivery to participatory approaches that emphasize co-creation, fairness, and meaningful engagement. Designing for cultural involvement involves focusing on the lived experiences, identities, and aspirations of communities as central to program design and delivery. It changes the perception of libraries from neutral venues to socially situated platforms for collective meaning-making.

To achieve this, the following design principles are essential:

- *Involving the community in program planning:* Rather than imposing top-down programming, libraries should adopt models that listen and respond to community feedback. Regular

channels for input, such as town halls, surveys, or advisory boards, allow libraries to align offerings with the changing needs and cultural specifics of their audiences. Ongoing consultation builds trust and legitimacy.

- *Recognizing and fairly compensating cultural facilitators:* Cultural workers—artists, educators, moderators, mentors—play vital roles in energizing library spaces and encouraging participation. Their contributions are often undervalued. Effective library transformation requires structures that formally recognize facilitators as designers of value, including fair pay, long-term contracts, and professional development paths.
- *Creating impact metrics that consider emotional impact, identity affirmation, and belonging:* Standard metrics like attendance do not provide full insight into how programs impact participants. A more comprehensive evaluation framework should include qualitative aspects—such as the feelings participants gain from a session, its reflection of their cultural identity, or its ability to foster belonging. Such metrics are vital for understanding the deeper social and emotional value of cultural engagement.
- *Promoting co-authorship in program design to share authority:* Libraries should transition from merely serving audiences to collaborating with them as co-creators. This involves decentralizing power and establishing open structures for joint decision-making. When participants help shape what is taught or shared, the library transforms into a space for democratic learning instead of just cultural delivery. Co-authorship validates diverse knowledge, strengthens investment, and enhances a sense of ownership and agency.

Public Libraries as Rhizomatic Learning Spaces

Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome, which is non-hierarchical, multidirectional, and decentralized, provides a strong metaphor for viewing libraries as learning spaces. Unlike traditional schools, libraries do not require a set curriculum. They promote emergent, cross-disciplinary, and self-directed learning paths. The rhizomatic model aligns with Freire's critical pedagogy, highlighting education as an organic process that is liberating and rooted in lived experience.

Within School of Life, this rhizomatic idea is seen in:

- The presence of intergenerational learners
- The blending of artistic, technological, and linguistic skills
- The dynamic interaction between mentors, facilitators, and learners
- The non-linear flow of activities where outcomes are jointly defined

This openness allows for the growth of learning communities that are resilient, flexible, and inclusive. Furthermore, changes in library spaces, such as mobile furniture, flexible seating, and collaboration areas, reflect Lefebvre's idea of lived space, created through use and interaction.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Libraries as Cultural Infrastructure

School of Life shows that libraries are no longer just places for borrowing books; they are essential cultural infrastructures woven into the social and cognitive fabric of the city. They act as inclusive civic platforms where people exchange knowledge, negotiate identities, and engage creatively. Inspired by Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city, public libraries become venues where communities can regain control over their learning, culture, and sense of belonging. For policymakers and cultural planners, this repositions libraries as active parts of urban change, crucial for promoting lifelong learning, cultural development, and social innovation.

School of Life initiative illustrates how libraries can ensure fair access to high-quality, non-formal education that goes beyond economic and institutional barriers. By doing this, they fill significant gaps left by formal education systems, especially in diverse urban areas where traditional institutions may overlook the needs of marginalized or intergenerational learners. By providing free, intergenerational, and community-based programs, libraries help level the playing field in the cultural and educational landscape by strengthening abilities, encouraging intercultural dialogue, and enhancing civic unity. Therefore, library initiatives like School of Life should be included in larger policy plans for promoting inclusive urban growth, cultural sustainability, and equal education.

Spatial Reimagination and the Right to the City

The changes in libraries must also be viewed in the context of urban spatial politics. Lefebvre argues that the "right to the city" involves all residents having a say in shaping urban space. Public libraries, in this view, create accessible areas that challenge commercial and exclusionary urban development. By hosting multi-sensory workshops, intergenerational programs, and open exhibitions, libraries reclaim space for cultural commons. They function as neutral settings for diverse conversations, which is crucial in multicultural cities like Dubai.

The redesign of library interiors to feature maker zones, discussion areas, and gallery walls marks a shift from static knowledge consumption to vibrant cultural production. School of Life plays a role in this spatial reimagination by embedding learning in everyday civic life. These practices support cultural sustainability by creating structures for intergenerational cultural sharing and collective ownership of public space.

Industry Relevance and Workforce Futures

A key part of the School of Life initiative is its focus on emerging industry trends and skills essential for future work. In a quickly changing economy shaped by automation, climate change, and digital shifts, traditional education routes are no longer enough. By placing learning in cultural settings and

emphasizing hands-on, project-based, and cross-disciplinary approaches, School of Life gives learners early access to industry-relevant knowledge and mindsets.

Collaborations with industry leaders have been vital in connecting cultural learning with job opportunities. Programs were co-created with industry experts, ensuring that what libraries offer is not only relevant but also valuable professionally. These partnerships have allowed learners to gain direct insights into real-world practices and expectations across creative and knowledge-based industries. As a result, participants are better equipped with both soft skills and industry-specific competencies that enhance their employability.

These partnerships encourage:

- Transferable skills, such as teamwork, presentation, storytelling, and design thinking
- Portfolio development through practical projects and exhibitions
- Mentorship and visibility in creative, tech, and environmental fields
- Opportunities for competitions and further education

As Dubai and the wider area invest in knowledge economies, creative industries, and green technologies, School of Life shows how public libraries can act as career boosters, developing not just informed citizens but also adaptable, industry-ready individuals.

Navigating the Wheel of Tensions in Library Transformation

Reimagining public libraries as vibrant cultural learning ecosystems involves balancing multiple, often conflicting, elements. This can be seen as a “wheel of tensions,” consisting of five interconnected parts: people, purpose, system, experience, and growth.

- **People:** Libraries must meet the needs of diverse communities with different backgrounds and expectations. Ensuring inclusivity while addressing varying priorities requires continuous dialogue and flexibility.
- **Purpose:** Broadening the library’s mission beyond just lending books to include cultural engagement and skills development poses challenges in keeping clarity and focus with expanded roles.
- **System:** Institutional structures, governance models, and funding systems can either support or hinder innovation. Managing bureaucratic silos and securing ongoing resources are essential for long-term success.
- **Experience:** Designing engaging, relevant, and emotionally appealing programs is key for user retention and impact, but this demands ongoing adaptation and responsiveness to user feedback.
- **Growth:** Expanding successful initiatives while maintaining community connection and quality requires strategic planning, building capabilities, and reflective practice.

Recognizing and actively managing these tensions helps library initiatives maintain a balance between innovation and stability. The wheel metaphor shows that progress in one area impacts and relies on others, highlighting the need for holistic thinking in library transformation efforts.

Conclusion

Reimagined public libraries provide strong evidence of their potential to be engines of civic energy, lifelong learning, and cultural innovation. They are not just static places but are increasingly driven by informal education models, collaboration across sectors, and community-led storytelling. Initiatives like School of Life show how libraries can become fertile grounds for co-creation, intergenerational exchange, and participatory cultural production. In such settings, individuals do not just gain knowledge; they develop personal agency, build social connections, and co-create meaningful futures. These evolving functions highlight the library's role as both a mirror and a catalyst of societal transformation. By aligning with the rhythms and aspirations of their communities, libraries become vital infrastructures of care, imagination, and collective empowerment.

As cities globally face urgent issues of inclusion, cultural sustainability, and urban resilience, the public library stands out as a flexible and adaptive model. It embodies the “third place” concept (Oldenburg, 1999), providing open, non-commercial spaces that encourage trust, dialogue, and creativity among diverse groups. The unique mix of public and private, analog and digital, formal and informal within libraries positions them well to handle the complex, varied demands of urban life in the 21st century.

Ultimately, the transformation of public libraries reflects a broader change in civic infrastructure, moving from merely providing services to helping people create shared meaning. When viewed through ideas of spatial justice, ability enhancement, and human well-being, libraries become more than just learning spaces; they turn into active laboratories for democratic possibilities. They are places where culture is practiced, not just stored, and where the future is envisioned together, not dictated from above, but shaped by the community itself.

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Preserving the unstable: managing documentation and digital risks in contemporary art institutions

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ABSTRACT

In a context where contemporary art is shaped by experimentation, unstable materials and conceptual primacy, museums face unprecedented challenges in ensuring public access and long-term preservation. This study investigates how Belgian contemporary art institutions manage the conservation of digitised artworks and metadata, focusing on the risks of digital dissociation, understood as a tenth agent of deterioration of art, resulting from failures in data structuring or transmission.

Drawing on approaches from cultural management, preventive conservation and digital humanities, the research combines 21 interviews with museum professionals, analysis of digital tools and field observations. The findings reveal fragmented infrastructures, limited interoperability and persistent difficulties in documenting non-standardised artworks. The study underscores the urgency of establishing digital handling protocols and robust metadata governance to address the evolving ontology of contemporary artworks and to ensure the long-term resilience of digital heritage infrastructures. Although anchored in the Belgian context, the issues raised have international relevance.

Keywords:

Digital dissociation,
Contemporary art
documentation,
Preventive
conservation,
Digital heritage
infrastructures,
Metadata
governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the museum professionals who generously shared their insights during the interviews. This research would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Frances Berry (Chief Restorer at KANAL—Centre Pompidou) and Frédéric Lemmers (Head of the Digitisation Department at the Royal Library of Belgium).

Introduction

Contemporary art is characterised by an ambition to move beyond traditional artistic forms and by a constant interplay between materiality, concept and process. By moving away from conventional media and engaging with ephemeral, participatory or immaterial practices, contemporary art displaces the boundaries of the artwork and challenges the very frameworks of its preservation. Performances, installations, site-specific works and interactive or evolving pieces illustrate a formal and conceptual hybridity that challenges established tools of documentation, archiving and heritage transmission. This instability is not merely technical: it demands a redefinition of institutional responsibilities in the face of objects that defy standard cataloguing and inventory systems. The rise of digital practices within cultural institutions should be seen not as a rupture, but as a co-evolution with cultural industries and information technologies. Over time, digitisation has reshaped internal museum processes, influencing collection management, knowledge production and legitimisation mechanisms. In this context, documentation becomes a structuring operation at the intersection of technical, legal, curatorial and memorial dimensions (Parry, 2007).

This study engages with that dynamic by analysing how Belgian institutions manage data related to contemporary artworks, focusing on internal documentation and archival practices (excluding public or promotional uses) to assess conservation through metadata. This study is based on a central hypothesis: the existence of a structural risk referred to as *dissociation*, conceptualised as a “tenth agent of deterioration of arts” (Waller & Cato, 2019; Roland-Gosselin, 2021). Dissociation designates the growing disconnection between an artwork and the contextual, technical or interpretive information necessary for its recognition.

We propose here a renewed reading of this concept through its digital dimension, understood as failures in the structuring, circulation or transmission of documentary data.

To address the complexity of these issues, the research draws on fieldwork conducted across six Belgian institutions representative of the diversity of the national museum landscape, shared between federal, regional and communal authorities and reflecting a wide range of missions, governance models and documentation practices: S.M.A.K., MACS Grand-Hornu, BOZAR, the Design Museum Brussels, KANAL—Centre Pompidou and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

This corpus offers a wide range of organisational models, conservation approaches and digital ecosystems. While anchored in the Belgian context, the issues raised, including fragmented infrastructures, limited interoperability and difficulties in documenting non-standardised works, have clear international relevance.

Contemporary Art as a Paradigm Shift

Rather than defining contemporary art through fixed criteria, it is more accurate to see it as a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense: not a stylistic or chronological category, but an epistemological rupture that reconfigures aesthetic and institutional regimes (Kuhn, 1962; Heinrich, 2014). With contemporary art, meaning shifts beyond the object proposed by the artist to a space that exceeds it (Sagot-Duvaurox & Moureau, 2010). Artistic practice detaches from material completion and grounds itself in conceptual, processual or relational forms. Technical mastery gives way to innovation, autonomous gesture and reflexive intent. The work becomes an open structure to be completed, as Umberto Eco described in *The Open Work*, requiring the viewer's participation to be actualised (Eco, 1962).

This transformation carries legal implications, particularly within the Belgian and broader Western context. Article XI.165 of the Belgian Economic Law Code states that copyright protection depends on two conditions: originality, as the personal expression of the author and fixation in a perceptible form (Service public fédéral Économie, 2013; Pintiaux, 2023). Contemporary art, marked by dematerialisation and ephemerality, frequently challenges both. As Heinrich notes, many core assumptions of copyright become problematic in this context, giving rise to legal situations that are often “comical and always unpredictable” (Heinrich, 2014).

Readymades, *combine paintings*, *compressions*, *assemblages* and *installations* exemplify these tensions: industrially produced objects elevated to the status of art by the artist's sole act of designation, they occupy a blurred space between artistic and industrial property.³¹³ Contemporary art often involves delegated production, industrially sourced materials and compositions assembled without formal hierarchy or claims to authenticity (Llamas-Pacheco, 2020). Artists incorporate waste, raw, *junk* or manufactured elements, challenging traditional distinctions between noble and base matter (Goldberg, 2002). The philosopher and historian Krzysztof Pomian notes that from the 1950s onward, younger artists adopted industrial waste and applied techniques previously linked to technology, rendering any material potentially artistic (Pomian, 1998). In 1970 in his essay *Chance and Necessity*, Jacques Monod coined the term *artefact* to describe this hybrid mode of creation, situated between art and industry (Monod, 1970). This shift also alters the conditions of authorship. Moving away from the solitary craftsman model, contemporary creation often involves technicians, assistants or subcontractors. The artist's central act lies not in shaping matter but in devising a protocol, a vision or a configuration of existing elements to be redirected or reinterpreted (Breuil & Dazord, 2013). The work no longer stems from manual mastery, but from the artist's ability to mobilise production systems, express intent and propose a meaningful, non-hierarchical reading of the world (Maertens, 2008).

³¹³ A *readymade* refers to an object or group of objects, that has not been artistically modified but is recognised as an artwork solely by virtue of the artist's decision to designate it as such; a *combine painting* is a term introduced by Robert Rauschenberg in the late 1950s to describe an artwork that merges painting with sculptural elements, often incorporating everyday objects, prints, photographs or newspaper clippings.

Theoretical evolution of conservation put to the test by contemporary art and its risk of dissociation

From object to system: theoretical reconfigurations of conservation in the context of contemporary art

Given the multifaceted nature of contemporary art, it is essential, following Howard Becker's framework, which views artistic production as a cooperative network, to consider conservation as a collective system involving technicians, restorers, curators, archivists and especially artists (Becker, 1982; Barbut, 2010). Plural, ephemeral or technological works require an expanded approach, incorporating installation protocols, interviews, narratives and technical data (Llamas-Pacheco, 2022; Atelier Boronali, 2009). Formalised from the 1950s, the discipline of conservation-restoration emerged at the intersection of patrimonial, museological and epistemological concerns, in response to materially stable works such as paintings, sculptures, decorative and religious objects (Barkett & Smithen, 2006). Early theoretical models, notably that of Cesare Brandi, were grounded in an ontology of the artwork as a unified, historically and aesthetically defined object (Brandi, 1963). Restoration was thus conceived as the recovery of legibility through a methodical intervention guided by historical and aesthetic criteria. This paradigm, rooted in pictorial tradition, long shaped both professional training and institutional conservation practices. This foundation, however, has been increasingly unsettled by contemporary art's experimental turn. The artwork thus becomes plural, mutable and resistant to essentialisation, making conventional approaches to conservation increasingly inadequate (Heinich, 2014; Verbeeck, 2019). Conservation is thereby confronted with new blind spots: how to preserve what was meant to evolve, decay or vanish? How to restore without betraying an artwork whose becoming is inseparable from its transformation? And how can museums reconcile their long-term mission (preserve and display works of art) with the stewardship of works conceived in a logic of impermanence or even obsolescence?

The complexity of contemporary art lies not only in its unstable materials, but in the shifting relationships between artworks, artists, institutions and audiences, redefining its modes of description and management. This calls for a fundamental reassessment of the epistemic foundations of conservation and management of art.

As contemporary artist Robert Gober aptly noted:

"If you don't know what material an artwork is made of, who made it and how it was made, you cannot understand what it is all about."

Authenticity, once grounded in material permanence, now hinges on the artist's intent and discourse, the fidelity of an installation protocol, their testimony and the non-hierarchical constellation of the

work's elements (Wu & Hou, 2015). The conservator's role thus expands from technician or historian to mediator, archivist and at times co-author of the work's persistence. This shift calls for digital infrastructures that are both flexible, able to accommodate the evolving forms of contemporary artworks and robust, ensuring their long-term preservation (Engel & Wharton, 2017).

When form is not meant to endure, the archive must preserve not only the physical trace but the work's evolving concept, from the input (intention) to the output (attention) (Quabeck, 2021). In response to such transformations, a new wave of theorists has redefined the discipline's foundations. Among them, Salvador Muñoz Viñas plays a central role in challenging classical categories through a pragmatic, pluralist and critical approach. He reframes the artwork as a relational system whose conservation engages semiotic, contextual and discursive dimensions (Muñoz Viñas, 2020). More radically, he argues that conservation is always interpretive, shaped by ideological and institutional frameworks. This position, now widely shared, marks a shift from preserving objects to managing their potentialities; from materiality to memory; from fixity to multiplicity. The challenges of conservation-restoration thus emerge from a productive tension between institutional needs for stability and the variability of contemporary forms.

Introduction to the risk of dissociation: analogue and digital manifestations

In this context, a growing desire for the standardisation of conservation practices has gradually emerged. It was in the 1990s that the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) identified nine major agents of deterioration of art (fire, water, light, etc.), to which Robert Waller added a tenth: dissociation.

Often little known, dissociation refers to a form of non-material disintegration of the artwork: it compromises the understanding, management or identification of an object, affecting its legal, intellectual and cultural dimensions. It may occur in a punctual, sporadic or progressive manner, notably as a result of poor documentation practices, human error (incorrect reading of an inventory number, mishandling causing the loss of structural components, etc.) or inadequate material conditions (degraded labels, failing adhesives, etc.) (Rose, Hawks & Waller, 2019). Unlike other agents of deterioration, dissociation results less from the natural ageing of materials than from dysfunctions within management and archival systems, often aggravated by understaffing or limited resources. It represents a form of organisational entropy, gradually eroding the conditions that allow a work to remain intelligible and transmissible. This deterioration is not visible to the naked eye; it acts silently, causing the perception of the work to fade. Beyond hindering conservation, dissociation operates as a latent mechanism of forgetting, intervening across several layers of art management (see Table 1). Given the inherent fragility of contemporary art, its exposure to such risks is particularly acute.

Output	Attentionality	Audience interpretations	Emotional and intellectual responses, contextual expectations, and cultural framing	Lack of documentation of reception: risk of erasing evolving meanings and public resonance
		Discourse and mediation	Mechanisms of transmission and conceptual engagement with the artwork, encompassing curatorial interpretation, communication strategies toward publics	Loss of narrative continuity: risk of interpretive drift and weakened public transmission
		Conditions of activation	Parameters determining the temporal, spatial, and interactional context in which the work is presented or reactivated (duration, space, light, sound, public interaction)	Undefined or unrecorded parameters: risk of conceptual distortion during reactivation
		Quinary data	Handling instructions, packing and transport protocols, installation plans, lists of required equipment or materials, and environmental monitoring procedures	Loss of procedural knowledge: risk of incorrect installation or environmental damage
		Quaternary data	Conservation protocols, storage, preservation, and logistics, including decisions regarding integral or fragmented conservation strategies	Absence of technical guidance: risk of improper conservation or fragmented integrity
		Tertiary data	Interpretative and historical information, discursive frameworks, provenance narratives, and intellectual tools necessary for conceptual understanding	Loss of contextual meaning: risk of interpretative fragmentation, misrepresentation
		Secondary data	Inventory number, acquisition method & date, name of donor/testator/seller, official registration in museum records	Administrative gap and inconsistencies: risk of provenance loss, legal ambiguity
		Primary data	Object designation, marks and inscriptions, constituent materials, production techniques, dimensions, and physical condition at the time of acquisition	Incomplete or inaccurate recording: risk of loss of material descriptors
		Object	The material entity : simple or composite, formal or conceptual in nature	Lack of material clarity: risk of physical instability
		Idea	Artistic primacy, creative intention of the artist or artists	
Input	Intentionality	Layers of Contemporary Artwork Documentation and Interpretation		Risks of Dissociation

TABLE 1. FROM INTENTION TO ATTENTION: LAYERS AND RISKS OF DISSOCIATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART.

Source: Own elaboration.

While Waller and Cato's original concept of dissociation was rooted in analogue system, it is imperative to extend this framework to digital infrastructures that enable the management of art pieces. The risk does not vanish with digitisation, on the contrary, it mutates.

Just as physical artworks suffer from dissociation, digital systems are subject to a parallel entropy: the gradual breakdown of the coherence, retrievability and intelligibility of metadata. In this context, we may conceptualise this as a “digital dissociation”.

This phenomenon can take multiple forms: erroneous data entry, redundant or contradictory metadata, obsolescence of storage formats, production of file duplicates, corruption of digital files and fragmentation of information across platforms (Bindyk, 2002; Boydens, 2004). Poor communication between departments, the absence of standardised protocols and the rapid obsolescence of digital media amplify these vulnerabilities. As seen in cases like the Asian Art Museum or the Smithsonian, cyberattacks and technical failures can also erase years of documentation, compromising not only the object's traceability but its conceptual survival (Clais, 2022; Krauze, 2024). In contemporary art, where meaning often lies in activation, discourse or ephemeral gestures, such losses are critical.

Methodology: From Conceptual Definition to Empirical Inquiry

This research adopts a qualitative approach aimed at analysing how Belgian art institutions conceptualise and manage the conservation of contemporary artworks metadata in the face of digital dissociation. The methodological framework is based on the triangulation of three complementary sources: semi-structured interviews, *in situ* observations and documentary analysis of digital systems. Twenty-one interviews are conducted with professionals working in various institutional roles like

curators, data managers, registrars and conservator-restorers, providing access to differentiated viewpoints on documentation protocols, institutional priorities and technical constraints.³¹⁴ These interviews are thematically coded and analysed to identify recurring tensions, institutional logics and adaptation strategies.

Field observations are carried out within six institutions selected for their diversity in terms of status, missions and degrees of digital maturity: S.M.A.K, MACS Grand-Hornu, BOZAR, the Design Museum Brussels, KANAL—Centre Pompidou and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. The Belgian institutional landscape is particularly instructive in this regard: split between federal, community, regional and private actors, it presents a remarkable variability within a relatively small geographic territory. Federal museums, for instance, are subject to bilingual obligations and benefit from distinct legal and financial frameworks compared to institutions managed at the community or regional level. This heterogeneity results in widely divergent infrastructures, resources and technical teams, depending on whether one is dealing with a state museum, a public utility foundation, a non-collecting exhibition space or a contemporary art center. This disparity is illustrated by the fact that unlike in France, where public museums are legally required to carry out a full inventory check every ten years (*récolement décennal*), Belgian public institutions are not subject to any such obligation (Lefèvre, 2022).³¹⁵ This absence of binding regulatory frameworks further accentuates institutional disparities and reinforces the discretionary nature of documentation practices across the country.

This institutional heterogeneity allows the research to identify both systemic issues and context-specific responses, highlighting structural asymmetries in the digitisation and documentation of contemporary art. While some institutions tend to develop highly formalised, interoperable systems supported by dedicated departments, others rely on more fragile, transitional or decentralised solutions like spreadsheets, email archives or informal knowledge sharing among staff members.

The cultural sector is largely sustained by passion-driven professions, compounded by an accelerated pace of exhibitions and cultural programming and often marked by precarious conditions and high rates of burnout, which raises concerns about the vulnerability of databases managed by one or two individuals within an institution, as is still the case in several museums (Vassal et al., 2022; Merritt, 2021).

In addition to interviews and observations, the study includes a comparative analysis of the digital tools in use across these institutions. Particular attention is paid to collection management software

³¹⁴ The term *registrar* derives from the contraction of two Anglo-Saxon terms: *curator* (conservator) and *register* (record keeper). This profession, which emerged from the progressive professionalisation of museum functions, was initially developed in Anglo-Saxon countries during the 1980s.

³¹⁵ The French term *récolement décennal* consists in verifying every ten years the entire set of objects registered in the inventory, in order to ensure rigorous management of public assets entrusted to museum institutions. Although no sanction is foreseen in case of non-compliance, this obligation is characterised by its systematic and regular nature.

(CMS), custom-built databases and informal workarounds (Excel spreadsheets, paper archives, protocol sheets, image folders). The analysis investigates the capacity of these systems to accommodate complex, non-standardised artworks and their associated metadata, while also evaluating their long-term reliability, interoperability and vulnerability to data loss.

The institutional corpus was selected through purposive sampling, with the aim of achieving representativeness while also highlighting contrasts and frictions. By triangulating discourse, practice and infrastructure, the study offers a situated understanding of dissociation as both concept and operational risk.

Results: From Conceptual Definition to Empirical Inquiry

Heterogeneity of Digital Infrastructures

The cross-analysis of the six institutions studied, along with several peripheral structures, reveals significant disparities in the digital architectures employed for collection documentation, as illustrated in Table 2. This heterogeneity often appears even within a single institution, reflecting fragmented practices and divergent uses across departments such as registration, logistics, conservation, curatorial and education. These variations also manifest at the individual level: an art historian, for instance, does not describe a work in the same terms as a conservator or registrar, highlighting the pivotal yet inconsistently defined role of the registrar across museums.

Institution	Data Management System	Type	Dissociation Risks
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels	V-Smart by Vubis (co-developed with Axiell with VUB University) Searching for a CMS in 2026	ILS (Integrated Library System) with CRM components, Belgica-developed (VUB)	Bibliographic structure poorly accommodates complex artworks; risks of fragmentation and flattening. A museum of this scale requires a comprehensive, dedicated CMS to address the complexity of contemporary collections and support curatorial, conservation, and documentation workflows.
KANAL Centre Pompidou Brussels	S-Museum by SKINSOFT	CMS (Collection Management System), France-developed	Structural constraints and single shared interface hinder tailored protocols; absence of intra-object hierarchy complicates documentation of complex artworks, raising risks of semantic and structural dissociation.
BOZAR, Brussels	MyEXPO by SKINSOFT + Windows files	CMS (Collection Management System), France-developed	Non-collection space, requiring only basic access to collection data for the curatorial team; other departments maintain dedicated documentation files (data windows).
Fashion Museum Antwerp (MoMu)	TMS (The Museum System) by Zetcom , (under the advice of Meemoo, Flanders Institute of archive)	CMS (Collection Management System), US-developed, semi-customisable	Rigid object modelling and limited sub-recording complicate the documentation of ensembles clothes and interconnected items; system complexity may hinder adaptation to iterative or conceptual works
S.M.A.K, Gent	Axiell (under the advice of Meemoo, Flanders Institute of archive)	CMS (Collection Management System)	Technological dependency on a general-purpose developer with no specific focus on contemporary art creates dissociation risks. The system presents difficulties in documenting complex objects, tracking them in situ, and managing logistical workflows.
Design Museum Brussels (DMB)	Access (internal database) + Drupal (web interface) + Excel (used by staff for daily management and data implementation) Searching for a CMS in 2026	Access by Microsoft Drupal (open-source CMS), Belgica-developed (University of Antwerp)	Data redundancy and fragmentation due to parallel use of multiple systems (Access, Excel, Drupal); lack of interoperability between platforms and versioning updates; multiple data entries increase the likelihood of inconsistencies and human error; absence of a unified CMS compromises data traceability and integrity over time.
Mac's Grand Hornu Mons	VideoMuseum = Navigart (web interface) + Gcoll (internal database)	CMS based Consortium of modern and contemporary art collections. France-developed	Limited relational structuring and hierarchical depth; reliance on outdated architecture (early 2000s); functional constraints for complex or interconnected artworks; dependency on external updates from VideoMuseum restricts adaptability to contemporary needs.
Musée d'Ixelles Brussels	Collection.heritage.Brussels	Shared Collection inventory database, Belgica-developed by Urban Brussels	Minimally suited for complex contemporary artworks; lacks object hierarchisation and integration with logistical spaces. Designed for traditional heritage, not contemporary practices

TABLE 2. PANEL ANALYSIS OF DATA SYSTEMS AND DOCUMENTATION FRAGILITY IN BELGIAN CONTEMPORARY ART INSTITUTIONS.**Source: Own elaboration.**

Some institutions rely on large-scale proprietary software, such as MuseumPlus (developed by Zetcom), The Museum System (TMS, developed by Gallery Systems) or S-Museum (developed by SKINsoft). Typically developed by external firms and hosted in the cloud, these platforms require substantial investment and entail partial outsourcing of collection management. While they offer structural stability, they sometimes prove inadequate when applied to non-standardised contemporary artworks, including multi-part, evolving or processual pieces (Engel & Wharton, 2017). Other institutions, especially those affiliated with regional or community-based consortiums, must work with more rigid and less customisable systems. One example is the Collections Heritage Brussels platform, which imposes a standardised interface with limited adaptability across museums in the Brussels-Capital Region. Alongside these centralised tools, more hybrid or artisanal systems persist, such as Navigart and Gcoll—databases developed in the early 2000s by the Centre Pompidou in partnership with Videomuseum to support French contemporary art museums. Despite their pioneering role, these systems now present certain limitations. Among the institutions studied, only the MACS Grand-Hornu currently benefits from access to Navigart, making it an exception within the Belgian museum landscape. In parallel, many museums still rely on Excel spreadsheets like the Design Museum of Brussels does, which are often restricted to alphanumeric data only, as including images proves too heavy for managing full collection inventories. These are frequently supplemented by paper files, sometimes maintained exclusively by curators reluctant to adopt digital tools. Such practices hinder information consolidation and contribute to further fragmentation. These discrepancies arise not only from unequal financial resources but also from divergent governance models, institutional attitudes toward digitisation and the strategic tension between technological autonomy and reliance on external providers.

From this analysis emerge three main documentation logics: a top-down model where digitisation is institutionalised and managed by specialised teams (inside and outside of the museum); a bottom-up approach driven by technical museum staff responding pragmatically to constraints; and horizontal or collaborative models that favour open-source tools and interdepartmental knowledge exchange.

Transmission Failures and Digital Dissociation

The heterogeneity of digital infrastructures is compounded by the structural compartmentalisation of museum departments. Documentation, conservation, archives and registrar functions often operate in parallel without rigid protocol (Daynes-Diallo, Philippot, 2022). This fragmentation hinders interoperability, especially during loans or inter-institutional collaborations, leading to duplicated records, inconsistencies and metadata gaps (Laforet, 2023). Such disjunctions contribute to a form

of digital dissociation, in which artworks become disconnected from the documentary traces necessary for their management and long-term intelligibility. Interviews reveal missing or informal installation protocols, sometimes stored in personal email accounts, as well as insufficient acquisition data. The lack of visual documentation in particular prevents the reactivation of complex works (Jagot, 2022). For fragile materials like plastics, databases often fail to distinguish between storage boxes by composition, leading to risks of degradation. Traditional formats, including inventory sheets and standardised databases, are ill-suited to capturing the evolving, performative or procedural nature of many contemporary works (Masanes, 2003; Engel & Wharton, 2017). Their limited descriptive granularity restricts the articulation of distinctions between support, activation, process and environment, thus fragmenting the ontological coherence of the work and obscuring the intentions that underpin it.³¹⁶

Innovations and Professional Adjustments

Faced with the limitations of software design, financial constraints and understaffing, museum professionals from the panel have developed a range of informal strategies: paper files supplementing digital records, annotated photographs stored outside institutional systems, installation booklets placed in transport crates, informal email exchanges or personal storage solutions. These workarounds demonstrate adaptability and professional commitment, but also heighten the fragility of documentation, often reliant on the memory and initiative of a few individuals. In parallel, more formal initiatives are emerging to enhance interoperability and improve the descriptive scope of museum systems.

Some institutions are developing open-source thesauri specifically designed to address the complexity of contemporary artworks.³¹⁷ This is particularly relevant in Belgium, where databases and public communication often need to function in three or even four languages, depending on the linguistic communities involved, namely French, Dutch, German and increasingly English. Meanwhile, other institutions adopt standardised templates for condition reports and technical sheets to streamline and pool practices. Complementary measures include data entry charters, digital forms and harmonised procedures for keywords, images and backups, reflecting an increasing awareness of structural limitations.

³¹⁶ Granularity refers to the level of detail at which data are structured and recorded within a database, shaping the descriptive precision, interoperability potential, and overall complexity of the system.

³¹⁷ In museums, a thesaurus is a controlled vocabulary used to standardise terms in collection records, improve searchability and ensure consistency and interoperability across databases. The development of structured thesauri for contemporary art is hindered by the fluidity of artistic categories, the inadequacy of existing normative vocabularies, institutional, linguistic and interpretative constraints that complicate efforts toward unified documentation frameworks.

Beyond these technical upgrades, a broader vision of the museum's mission is being reaffirmed, one that includes not only conservation but also the production and transmission of knowledge. This involves gathering artist interviews, preserving artists' editions and archiving contextual materials that anchor each work within a wider cultural, historical and discursive framework (Engel & Wharton, 2017; INCCA, 2002). Such resources allow for an understanding of the artwork that exceeds its physical presence and support future research, display and activation across institutional boundaries.

Discussion and conclusion: Towards a Protocol-Based Approach to Contemporary Art Documentation

The analysis underscores the need for a fundamental shift in documentation strategies, moving beyond technical updates toward a redefinition of institutional epistemologies. Given the ontological instability and procedural complexity of contemporary artworks, documentation can no longer be treated as a neutral or static act if digital dissociation is to be avoided. The configuration of the museum's documentary space reflects its structural logic, access modalities and logistical constraints, and actively shapes the relationships between data, objects and people. Documentation must therefore become a situated practice, responsive to the materiality of works, their contextual emergence, and their evolving modes of activation and reception. This calls for a move away from standardised templates toward more flexible recording methods that acknowledge the singularity of each object and the plurality of its material and temporal expressions (Lyon, 2020). Such a reconfiguration also requires renewed recognition of the role played by field professionals such as registrars, conservators, collection managers and technicians, who act as interfaces between artworks, databases and future stewards of heritage. Far from being passive users of institutional tools, their daily decisions shape how collections are described, understood and transmitted. Their proximity to the works, combined with their tacit knowledge, must inform the design of digital infrastructures if these are to be both technically resilient and epistemologically meaningful.

At the same time, recent technological developments are reshaping documentation practices to address the complexity of contemporary artworks. Mobile-accessible collection management systems now enable real-time updates during installation or conservation. Some institutions have adopted tracking logistic tools such as RFID chips and QR-coded storage labels to monitor object movement and ensure traceability.³¹⁸ Artificial intelligence is being explored to support object recognition, metadata standardisation and image analysis, while controlled vocabularies facilitate the harmonisation of entries across departments.

³¹⁸ RFID chips (Radio Frequency Identification chips) are small electronic devices that allow objects to be identified, tracked or authenticated remotely using radio waves. They are widely used across various fields, including logistics, libraries, museums and security systems.

These innovations reflect a broader shift towards more interoperable and decentralised infrastructures, where documentation operates not merely as a technical procedure, but as a dynamic and relational interface between systems, artworks and professionals.

However, no unified protocol has yet emerged to address the complexity of contemporary heritage management in museums. The inherently organic and adaptive nature of museum work means that documentation practices often respond to institutional constraints rather than to overarching theoretical frameworks. As a result, they remain closely tied to local contexts, professional discretion and informal routines. To address this fragmentation, heritage policies must begin to integrate digital concerns not as supplementary layers but as core components of acquisition, conservation and transmission. This requires rethinking metadata governance, formalising cross-departmental documentation charters and adapting input procedures to the specific workflows of curatorial, conservation, education and logistics teams. Such measures would foster more coherent and sustainable systems, while remaining attentive to the diversity of forms and practices that define contemporary cultural heritage.

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The Museum of Survivors: Enhancing Access and Engagement through Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how a digital museum centered on the experiences of children affected by war can enhance access to cultural heritage and foster engagement through participatory storytelling. Drawing on decolonial and postcolonial critiques of traditional museum practices, the project responds to the structural exclusions and power dynamics often embedded in curatorial institutions. By foregrounding personal narratives and offering decentralized, mobile access, the museum disrupts hierarchical storytelling models and opens new forms of engagement, particularly among younger audiences. Two key findings emerge: first, digital storytelling allows for collaborative, less hierarchical representation of lived experience; second, its integration into school workshops reveals its potential as an educational tool that fosters empathy, reflection, and connection between students and historical memory. Through its ethical and inclusive methodology, the museum exemplifies how digital platforms can support more dialogical and affective forms of cultural preservation and public engagement.

Keywords:

Digital Accessibility,
Storytelling,
Marginalized
Voices, Community
Engagement,
Collective Memory

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the entire Museum of Survivors team for entrusting me with the opportunity to highlight this meaningful and collaborative project. My deepest thanks go to Irena Klissenbauer, Daniele Karasz, Klaudija Bilić-Selmanović and Birgit Riel for their unwavering dedication and vision, as well as to the broader circle of supporters – Katerina Ljumić-Janceva, Ulla Konrad, Nicole Zimmermann, Lucas Martin, and Lukas Schretter – whose ongoing encouragement and contributions have helped shape the museum into what it is today.

I am also grateful to the educators who welcomed the museum into their classrooms and made the school workshops such an enriching experience: Irena Klissenbauer, Sedra Arab, Birgit Riel, and Marko Dinić. Your openness and commitment to dialogical learning have been invaluable.

Above all, I want to thank the individuals who courageously shared their stories for the museum. Without your voices, this work would not be possible. I also acknowledge the efforts of our dedicated helpers – Tijana Adamović, Julia Salzburger, Laurenz Haider, Larissa Mannheim, Tobias Schlangen and many others – whose behind-the-scenes support has been essential throughout the process.

Finally, a sincere thank you to the sponsors and funding institutions who made the development of the Museum of Survivors a reality: The Federal ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport; The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection; Federal Ministry of Education; Cultural Department of the City of Vienna; Zukunftsfonds of the Republic of Austria; and OEAD. Your support has allowed us to create a space for remembrance, reflection, and education that is both accessible and impactful.

Introduction

Museums are commonly perceived as spaces of knowledge, education, and cultural preservation. However, critical anthropological debates, particularly those from postcolonial and decolonial scholars (Mohanty 2003; hooks 2014), have consistently highlighted their inherent complexity as spaces embodying forms of violence. Not necessarily through what histories are represented, but in how marginalised narratives are presented and who is allowed or able to access them. Questions of power thus emerge prominently: what is exhibited, whose narratives are privileged, how stories are told, and who can engage with these narratives? This critique exposes museums as institutions that can inadvertently marginalize or silence specific voices, shaping collective memory in exclusive and often hegemonic ways.

Responding to this critique, this article explores innovative possibilities for rethinking museum practices by integrating digital storytelling and participatory education initiatives involving eyewitnesses. Specifically, it addresses the research question: How can digital storytelling in museums foster empathy and engagement among younger generations while contributing to the preservation and recontextualization of cultural heritage?

Taking the recently established Museum of Survivors (2024) as an exemplifying point, this paper examines how digital platforms can decentralize traditional archival access, effectively enabling the museum experience to be transported into diverse spaces, including classrooms and homes (Bodó et al. 2021; Brook et al. 2020). Furthermore, the museum introduces counter-narratives about children experiencing war in Austria, reframing these experiences neither as distant problems confined to other countries nor as historical events detached from the present, but as ongoing influences shaping contemporary society. Through its decentralized, digital and participatory approach, the Museum of Survivors challenges traditional curatorial structures and promotes active engagement and critical reflection among (but not only) younger audiences. By examining these practices, this paper seeks to illuminate digital storytelling's transformative potential as a method for democratizing historical narratives and fostering inclusive, empathetic engagement with cultural heritage.

Digital Storytelling as Participatory Museum Practice

The traditional museum model has long operated through centralized, top-down structures where institutional authority determines what stories are told and how they are presented. Museums have historically functioned as singular, localized organizations that position visitors as passive recipients of predetermined narratives, maintaining what can be understood as a gatekeeping role in cultural representation (Corbet 2024). This conventional approach reflects broader power dynamics where cultural institutions have served as "once-authoritative formulators of predominantly heritage culture"

that have been "enlarging their practices beyond the exhibitory, educative and participatory to embrace making their space more social and inclusive" (Wilson-Barnao 2021, 12).

However, this institutional landscape has undergone significant transformation through two interconnected developments: decolonial critiques (hooks 2014; Mohanty 2003; Corbet 2024), and digital innovation (van Dijck 2007). Decolonial scholarship has increasingly challenged museums' colonial legacies and called for more inclusive representational practices, pushing institutions to reconsider their role in perpetuating hegemonic narratives. The International Council of Museums' recent attempts to revise their institutional definition to incorporate commitments to social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing exemplifies this broader shift toward recognizing museums' potential complicity in exclusionary practices (Wilson-Barnao 2021). Meanwhile, scholars working within memory studies have documented how archival practices can serve as "correctives and additions, rather than counters, to the historical archive, attempting to undo the ruptures caused by war and genocide" (Hirsch 2012, 120).

Simultaneously, digital technologies have fundamentally altered how cultural content can be accessed, created, and shared, offering new possibilities for democratizing museum practice. Digital storytelling emerges at this intersection as a practice that shifts certain curatorial or communicative functions, once carried out solely by institutional staff, into broader, participatory processes that invite contributions from a wide and often undefined public network through open engagement, thereby transforming traditional relationships between institutions and publics (Tammaro 2016). Rather than maintaining traditional institutional boundaries, digital platforms allow museums to act as connective infrastructures, providing global audiences with accessible and interactive ways to engage with digital collections available online. (Wilson-Barnao 2021). The significance of this shift becomes particularly apparent when considering how digital tools can amplify marginalized voices that have been historically excluded from dominant museum narratives. Contemporary museum practice increasingly demonstrates how digital platforms can serve counter-hegemonic functions, enabling communities to share stories that challenge or complicate official historical accounts. Memory activists in post-conflict contexts utilize "digital media as an arena, space, or repository for counter-memory narratives" , creating new possibilities for marginalized groups to "circulate counter-memories in an 'unmoored' digital public space" (Labonté 2024, 2). Projects such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's collaboration with Snapchat illustrate how digital technologies can open up space for engaging with previously overlooked histories by making lesser-known community narratives visible and linking them to contemporary debates around monuments, public art, representation, and national memory (Wilson-Barnao 2021).

The democratizing potential of digital storytelling extends beyond simple accessibility improvements. Digital platforms facilitate forms of participation where "the user's role changed dramatically, shifting from passive observers to active participants and content producers with many new and exciting

opportunities for engagement, creative use, and access" (Tammaro 2016, 2). This shift toward participatory engagement aligns with broader cultural trends, where audiences familiar with interactive platforms, such as social and streaming media, now expect similar opportunities to comment, contribute, and connect within cultural institutions, prompting museums to rethink their strategies for digital engagement (Wilson-Barnao 2021). Digital storytelling also facilitates what can be understood as affective engagement, where personal narratives create emotional connections that foster empathy and understanding across different communities and generations. Projects like the Museum of Survivors demonstrate how "sharing the painful individual experiences of war can create new mnemonic solidarities" (Hirsch 2012, 12) while digital archives enable the circulation of "alternative histories" that make "unexpected submerged local histories" visible (Hirsch 2012, 121). These platforms enable intimate encounters with historical experiences that transcend traditional museum boundaries, creating what memory scholars describe as spaces where "photographs present not only access to a historical reality, but to an affective 'historical poetics'" (Hirsch 2012, 127).

The integration of digital storytelling into museum practice represents a fundamental reimagining of curatorial authority and visitor agency, challenging traditional assumptions about expertise while creating possibilities for inclusive engagement that extends beyond physical museum walls.

The Museum of Survivors

The development process of the Museum of Survivors

About six years ago, in the quiet hours of an after-hours office in Vienna, the first conversations about what would eventually become the Museum of Survivors began to unfold. At the time, it was just the two founders, Irena Klissenbauer and Klaudija Bilić-Selmanović, both personally and professionally affected by histories of war, who were motivated by a shared recognition that Austria lacked a public, accessible space to talk about these themes. Their discussions were significantly influenced by initiatives like the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo (War Childhood Museum 2024), which centers the lived experiences of children affected by conflict. The founders observed that, despite Austria being deeply shaped by histories of migration, war, and flight, these stories were rarely discussed openly, especially when they belonged to the children of war being either directly affected or descendants, whose experiences are often silenced or overlooked in dominant public discourse.

Originally, their vision was to create a physical museum. However, this plan proved unfeasible due to financial constraints. Instead, specific digital-oriented funding made it possible to pursue the idea online. This shift did not mean a loss of vision but in fact introduced new opportunities. The digital form allowed for broader access, flexibility, and creative engagement with younger audiences, who

were always a central concern of the project. Thus, the museum was conceptualized in the format of a digital storyboard, similar to the Social Media Platform Instagram, allowing users to navigate stories visually and intuitively, with content structured around personal objects that anchor the narrative (see Figure 1) (Museum of Survivors 2024).

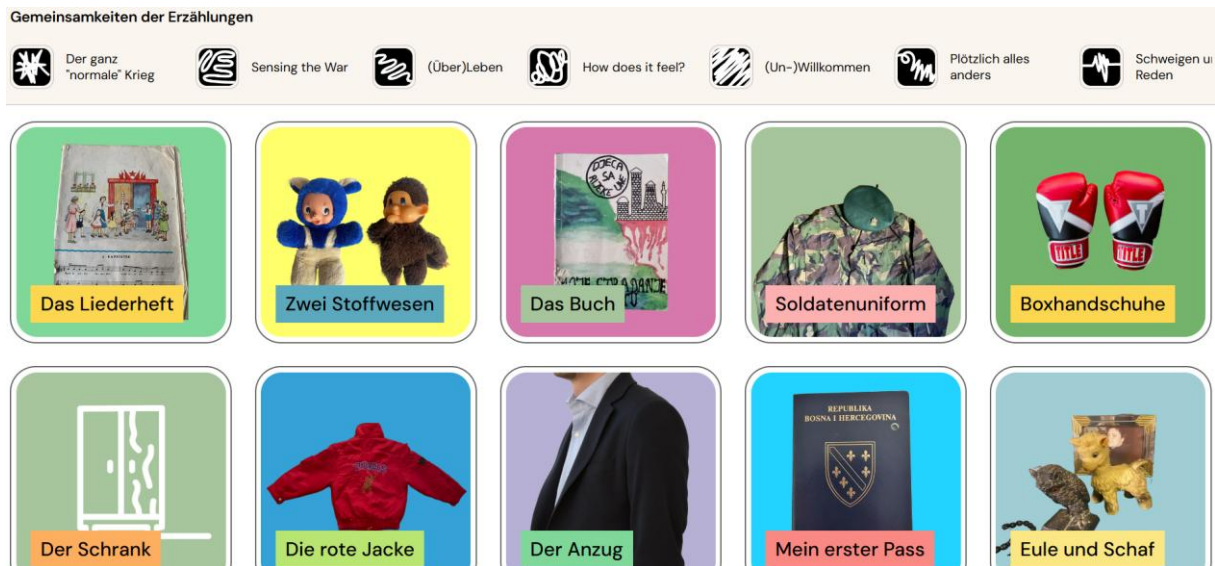


FIGURE 1. SCREENSHOT OF MUSEUM OF SURVIVORS INTERFACE.

Source: Museum of Survivors (2024). URL: www.museumofsurvivors.org

As the idea took shape, more people joined, and a diverse team formed. What emerged was the Museum of Survivors: an interactive online museum presenting personal narratives of war, flight, and the ways these experiences ripple across generations. Rather than simply cataloguing historical facts, the museum foregrounds subjective experiences. Visitors enter different digital rooms, each focused on a particular theme or region, where they can listen to carefully edited audio excerpts derived from longer interviews. These excerpts are paired with images of meaningful objects, through which the stories themselves are told. One digital room focuses on first-generation children survivors, sharing memories of war, escape, and rebuilding lives of their young age. Another features descendants reflecting on how their families' pasts continue to shape their identities and aspirations. These narratives are deeply personal, yet resonate with broader social patterns. Users can also filter by region or time period, allowing for customized exploration. Background information is provided through linked sources such as Encyclopedia Britannica, helping situate personal memories within broader historical contexts.

The Museum of Survivors offers a platform that invites both emotional connection and critical reflection. Its format encourages visitors, especially younger ones, to engage actively, not just absorb information. The goal is not to dictate a singular narrative, but to open up space for dialogue about the ongoing impact of conflict on individuals and societies. By digitally preserving and curating these

stories, the museum challenges the marginalization of certain memories in the public sphere and ensures that these experiences are not lost but carried forward. Therefore it becomes accessible for future generations, and embedded in broader educational, cultural, and research contexts.

Represented Voices and Stories within the Museum

The people whose voices shape the Museum of Survivors represent a broad and diverse spectrum of experiences. Building on the museum's aim to center personal narratives over abstract statistics or distant historical accounts, the interview participants form the living foundation of its digital archive. A total of 53 interviews were conducted, with 40 direct war witnesses and 13 descendants. The process of finding participants relied heavily on existing networks and snowball sampling. This allowed for organic outreach, especially within diasporic and migrant communities in Austria. Further, the museum tried to reach the peripheries of Austria as well, as the usual focus on migration is usually centered around the urban areas. The result is a heterogeneous group of narrators with each bringing unique memories and emotional landscapes into the digital space of the museum.

Among the 53 individuals, there is a notable gender distribution: 25 of the witnesses are women and 15 are men. Among the descendants, 8 are women and 5 are men (see Figure 2). This gendered aspect also informs the types of stories and objects shared—often reflecting differing social roles and emotional expressions linked to war and displacement, highlighting the importance of an intersectional perspective within issues of war and migration (Crenshaw 1991).

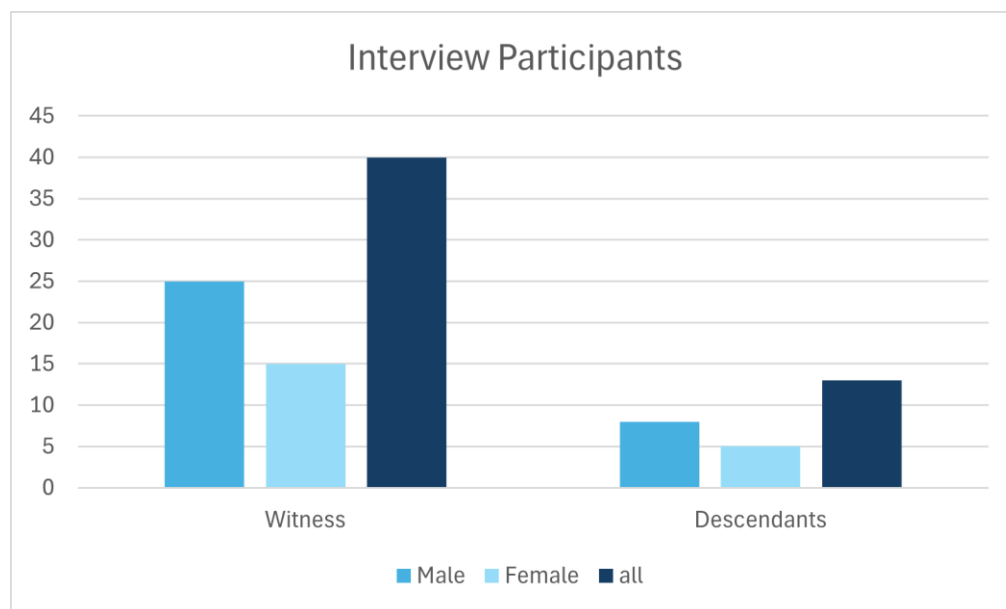


FIGURE 2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS DIVIDED BY WITNESSES AND DESCENDANTS.

Source: Own elaboration based on museum archive.

The geographical diversity of the narratives spans over 19 countries. While many stories originate from Bosnia-Herzegovina due to the geographical and generational proximity of that conflict to Austria, others come from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Chechnya, and Palestine, as well as countries such as El Salvador, Mexico, and Spain. A significant number also reflect on war-related experiences within Austria itself, underscoring the often-overlooked role of this country as both a site of displacement and a landscape marked by its own wartime past (see Figure 2).

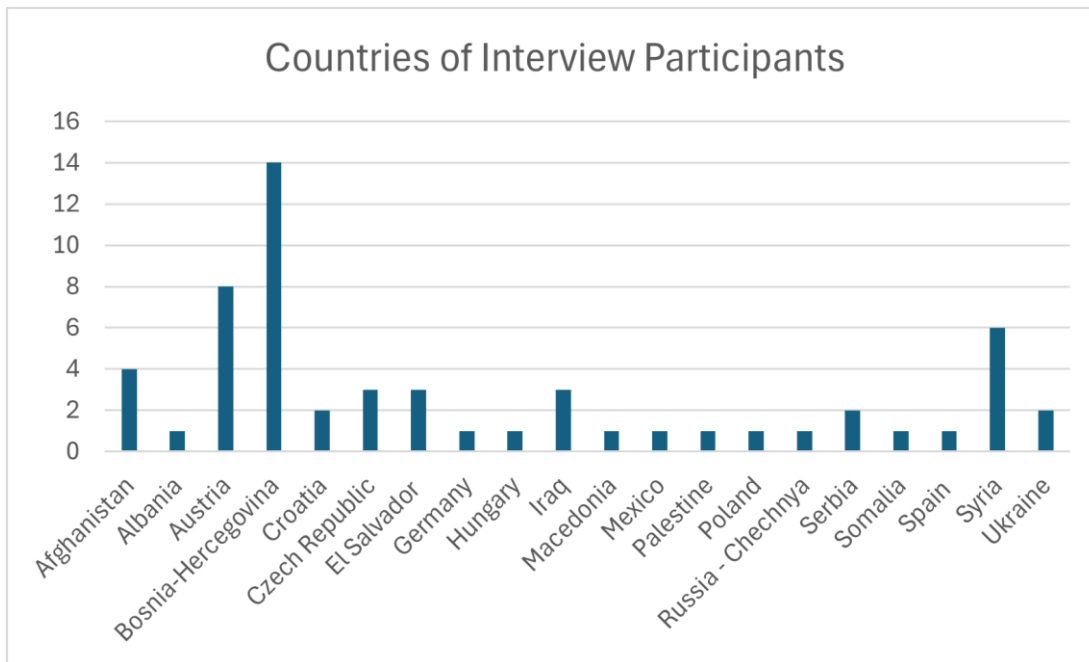


FIGURE 3. COUNTRIES OF THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS WITHIN THE STORIES.

Source: Own elaboration based on museum archive.

This mosaic of stories reveals that war and flight are not confined to particular regions or historical periods. The museum's collection makes visible how deeply interconnected personal and global histories are and how the legacies of violence, survival, and memory shape lives across generations and geographies.

Critical and Ethical Reflections

The creation of the Museum of Survivors did not only involve technological and curatorial decisions, but also demanded deep ethical and methodological reflection. At its core, the project engages with highly sensitive material like the stories of war, displacement, and the often painful legacies that follow. These stories are not simply content, but are personal testimonies, grounded in lived

experience. Recognizing this, the museum's approach to research and curation was designed to prioritize care, collaboration, and critical awareness. Therefore, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured narrative format, focusing on the period of war and its aftermath. The methodology was intentionally flexible, allowing participants to guide the conversation in ways that felt safe and meaningful for them. The well-being of interview participants was always the highest priority. To support this, the project collaborated closely with an organization that provides therapeutic services for individuals with experiences of war and forced displacement. Immediate post-interview support was available if needed, and the interdisciplinary team, which is composed of psychologists, anthropologists, and social scientists, ensured that time and space were given for reflection and emotional processing after each conversation.

Following each interview, the material was transcribed and thematically coded. Importantly, this was not done unilaterally. In keeping with decolonial methodological principles (Mohanty 2003; Corbet 2024; hooks 2014), the final decision on which aspects of an interview would be included in the museum was made collaboratively with the interview participants. This process of shared authorship not only aimed to avoid extractive practices, but to honor participants' agency in shaping how their experiences are represented.

Trauma and the possibility of retraumatization was a constant ethical consideration, not only during the interview process, but also in the curation of stories and their later use in educational settings. While care was taken not to avoid difficult topics solely out of fear, opt-out options were built into every phase. Participants could choose not to answer certain questions, pause or stop the interview, or withdraw consent for specific content at any point. Similarly, when engaging school groups with the material, students were informed of their right to disengage, and spaces were created for reflection and emotional grounding. Rather than avoiding complexity, the Museum of Survivors seeks to embrace it with responsibility. This ethical framework is centered on participation, consent, and emotional care. But it has been also foundational to the project's vision of building a respectful and inclusive archive that does not merely speak about people, but with them.

Findings

Redistributing Authority through Digital Narratives

One of the key findings that emerges from the development and implementation of the Museum of Survivors is the distinct potential of digital storytelling as a transformative curatorial approach. The digital format has not only made the museum accessible to a wider audience, but it has also enabled stories to be shared in ways that disrupt traditional hierarchies of knowledge and authority. By designing the museum as a digital platform and making it accessible via phones, tablets, or

computers, the stories contained within it are not bound to a fixed physical location. This portability makes it possible to bring the museum into classrooms, community centers, libraries, or private homes. Whether used as an educational resource or a reflective tool, this “take it everywhere” model radically shifts access to personal and collective histories, particularly for younger generations who are often digitally native.

Just as importantly, digital storytelling allows for a less hierarchical structure in how narratives are curated and presented. Traditional museum settings often rely on curators and institutional gatekeepers to interpret and contextualize material for the visitor. In contrast, the Museum of Survivors places the voices of the narrators, whether survivors or descendants, at the center. The visual design, modeled after Instagram storyboards, reinforces this horizontal storytelling format, allowing users to move intuitively through personal narratives without the overt presence of institutional framing. Indeed, the notion of a completely non-hierarchical structure is idealistic; there are still choices made about what is included, how it is presented, and by whom. However, the museum’s participatory design process, which includes shared decision-making with interview participants and a diverse interdisciplinary team, serves to redistribute curatorial authority. Rather than speaking about individuals from a distance, the platform speaks with them, and sometimes even through them, via the inclusion of their own words and perspectives. Thus, the digital form does not merely replicate traditional museum functions in a virtual space. It opens up new possibilities for engagement, representation, and collaboration that are critical in addressing difficult histories such as war and displacement. In doing so, it helps establish a more dialogical and empathetic public memory space.

Bringing the museum into the Classroom

A second key finding from the Museum of Survivors project is its considerable potential in educational settings, particularly through its integration into school workshops. Because the museum exists in a digital form, it has proven to be an accessible and adaptable tool for classroom engagement. The ability to bring the museum directly into schools without the need for travel or traditional exhibition infrastructure has created a powerful entry point for exploring complex topics such as war, displacement, and intergenerational memory with younger audiences.

Preliminary observations from workshops held in Austrian secondary schools done by the team of the Museum of Survivors collaboratively with interview participants suggest that students are not only responsive to the material but also deeply affected by the narratives. Many students report a more nuanced understanding of war’s ongoing impact, not just as a distant historical event, but as something that intersects with family histories, migration experiences, and the present-day social

fabric. One frequently heard comment during these sessions is: "Why are you interested in our stories? We have nothing to share." Interestingly, this same sentiment was often expressed by the museum's interview participants, who also often felt their stories were not significant because others had suffered more. The repetition of this phrase across generations reveals shared feelings of invisibility and undervaluation, and it becomes a key moment of connection in the classroom. The workshops are designed to foster this kind of reflective dialogue. By coupling the digital museum's narratives with space for students to reflect on their own stories, the sessions create opportunities for both personal introspection and critical engagement with broader societal dynamics. Students are not just passive consumers of history, but are invited to consider how their own identities, family pasts, and community contexts are part of wider historical and political frameworks.

These encounters highlight the museum's role not only as a repository of testimony but as a dialogical tool. Its digital format allows for an interplay between curated narratives and spontaneous classroom reflections, making history tangible and emotionally resonant. The Museum of Survivors, then, becomes a bridge across generations as well across perceived distances between personal and public memory, thereby fostering empathy, self-awareness, and deeper social understanding among youth.

Conclusion

The Museum of Survivors offers a compelling response to long-standing critiques of museum institutions by demonstrating how digital storytelling can reframe and recontextualize cultural heritage in participatory and inclusive ways. This paper set out to explore the question: How can digital storytelling in museums foster empathy and engagement among younger generations while contributing to the preservation and recontextualization of cultural heritage? The findings drawn from the Museum of Survivors suggest that digital curation, when grounded in ethical collaboration and emotional care, not only broadens access to cultural narratives but also transforms how these narratives are received and understood. Through its decentralized and mobile structure, the museum takes memory work out of the confines of elite cultural spaces and into classrooms, homes, and communities. It highlights the potential of digital media to dissolve barriers to access while also enabling storytelling practices that are less hierarchical and more participatory. The platform's visual and interactive design, influenced by social media formats familiar to younger users, strengthens emotional resonance and offers visitors a sense of intimacy with the stories being told. This format facilitates deeper engagement and reflection, especially when paired with educational programs that encourage students to connect these narratives to their own lived experiences.

Moreover, the museum's ethical commitment to collaborative authorship, consent, and care in curating sensitive content reflects a decolonial methodological approach that prioritizes agency and avoids extractive storytelling. The ability of both survivors and their descendants to decide how their stories are represented not only safeguards against retraumatization but also disrupts traditional institutional power dynamics. In conclusion, the Museum of Survivors exemplifies how digital storytelling can function as both an archival and educational tool, reimagining the role of museums in contemporary society. By fostering empathy, encouraging dialogue, and amplifying marginalized voices, it contributes meaningfully to the creation of a more inclusive, dynamic, and socially engaged collective memory.

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Between Rarity and Reuse: Cultural Value Assessment and Open Access Pathways for Out-of-Print Publications at the National Museum of Taiwan Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how out-of-print literary publications—often deemed culturally significant yet functionally inaccessible—can be evaluated and revitalised within contemporary open access and cultural governance frameworks. Using *Le Moulin No. 3*, a rare 1934 poetry magazine housed at the National Museum of Taiwan Literature, as a case study, the research proposes a dual-axis framework for assessing cultural value and public impact. The framework incorporates dimensions such as symbolic resonance, institutional visibility, legal clarity, and participatory potential, while also accounting for the interests of key stakeholders including collectors, heirs, institutions, and creative practitioners. Grounded in cultural value theory, open GLAM principles, and participatory governance models, this study argues for a shift from preservation-centred to reuse-oriented policy strategies. Ultimately, it calls for rights-aware, inclusive, and digitally enabled infrastructures to support the cultural renewal of rare literary artefacts in the public domain.

Keywords:

out-of-print
publications;
cultural value;
open access;
literary museums;
heritage
governance

Introduction: Between Rarity and Reuse

In the practice of cultural heritage preservation and reuse, the notions of rarity and reusability are often viewed as conflicting yet mutually entangled value logics. This is especially salient in literature museums, where out-of-print publications are commonly regarded as cultural assets that require careful protection due to their age, scarcity, and unclear rights status. However, it is precisely this limited accessibility that often prevents such rare materials from entering public knowledge systems, thereby diminishing their social visibility and potential for cultural reproduction. These “institutionally invisible cultural assets” in literature museums, if left without effective mechanisms for recognition, evaluation, and reinterpretation, are likely to remain at the periphery of cultural governance—unable to realize their potential contributions to education, creativity, and historical understanding (Throsby, 2001; Smith, 2006).

Literature itself is often perceived as distant from the general public, and literary artefacts, due to their historicity and specialised nature, can appear even more unfamiliar or inaccessible. If out-of-print publications remain confined to storage rooms or elite academic circles over time, they risk becoming disconnected from broader social audiences. Thus, how to bring these culturally and historically significant materials back into public view—and even more, how to encourage public participation in reinterpreting them through contemporary perspectives—has become a vital task for literature museums today.

With the global rise of digitisation and open data initiatives, cultural institutions are undergoing a transformation from passive preservers to active knowledge hubs and agents of cultural reinterpretation (UNESCO, 2019; McCarthy, 2023). If out-of-print publications can be reintroduced into the open data ecosystem through institutional design and renewed governance strategies, their cultural value may continue to be regenerated across new media and social contexts. However, current cultural evaluation systems still overwhelmingly rely on quantifiable performance metrics, which are ill-equipped to assess non-circulating, non-commercial cultural assets that carry profound symbolic and historical meaning (Holden, 2006). As a result, many significant holdings in literature museums remain in an awkward state of being “visible but not usable” (Bowrey, 2021).

This paper focuses on the case of *Le Moulin No. 3*, held by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL), to develop an evaluative framework that is both culturally sensitive and policy-relevant. Published by the Le Moulin Poetry Society in 1934, *Le Moulin No. 3* is the only known surviving physical copy of the magazine and has been designated as a National Antiquity by Taiwan’s Bureau of Cultural Heritage. Despite being fully digitised page by page, the magazine remains inaccessible to the public due to legal, institutional, and policy constraints. It has never been included in any cultural value or impact assessment tools, making it a paradigmatic example of a cultural asset with insufficient institutional visibility (Holden, 2015). This invisibility not only obstructs the possibilities for reuse and reinterpretation, but also undermines the museum’s ability to justify the human and financial resources needed to preserve and promote such materials.

This research sets out to achieve three primary objectives: first, to review and synthesise existing theories and frameworks of cultural value and impact assessment, identifying their applicability and limitations in relation to literary heritage (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; O'Brien, 2010); second, to propose an evaluative framework tailored specifically to out-of-print literary publications, structured around multiple dimensions including historical positioning, institutional visibility, cultural reinterpretation, and public impact; and third, to test the practical utility and institutional relevance of this framework through the case of *Le Moulin No. 3*, and to offer recommendations for cultural policy design and heritage governance.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach, incorporating literature review, institutional document analysis, policy comparison, and interpretive case study. The paper is structured into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research background, objectives, and methods. Chapter 2 examines the theoretical foundations and policy context related to cultural value and open access. Chapter 3 presents the case study of *Le Moulin No. 3*, including its publication history, literary significance, and reuse trajectory. Chapter 4 proposes the evaluative framework and indicator design, followed by its application to the case. Chapter 5 concludes with key findings, policy suggestions, and directions for future research.

This study aims to establish a framework for evaluating the cultural value and impact of out-of-print publications, while mapping pathways through which literary artefacts can be transformed into open cultural data. It seeks to provide new perspectives for digital cultural resource research, and to offer practical strategies for institutions such as literature museums in balancing cultural preservation with knowledge sharing. In the long term, this paper hopes to contribute new thinking to cultural policy development by addressing current legal barriers and limitations in open access practices (Open GLAM, n.d.), in order to promote fairness and accessibility in public cultural resources. Ultimately, literature museums should not be seen merely as custodians of history and culture, but as active facilitators of cultural sharing and knowledge co-production in the digital age.

Cultural Value, Governance, and the Logic of Openness

The evaluation of cultural assets has long been a central concern in cultural governance. In today's era of digital transformation, the question of how to measure, articulate, and strengthen the social significance of cultural heritage has become a growing priority in cultural policy and institutional practice. In particular, out-of-print literary publications—which are no longer circulating in the market but hold substantial historical and symbolic value—highlight the limitations of existing assessment models when applied to non-mainstream forms of cultural heritage. As such, developing a framework that addresses the interpretive depth, institutional positioning, and public engagement potential of these assets is not only essential for closing policy gaps but also critical for enabling cultural institutions to make more sensitive and informed decisions about knowledge sharing and resource allocation.

The Multi-Dimensionality of Cultural Value

Cultural value has never been easily captured by a single metric. Throsby (2001, 2010) argues that cultural assets possess various non-market attributes—such as aesthetic value, historical meaning, communal identity, and spiritual significance—and that these should be taken into account in policy decisions. Holden (2004, 2006) further distinguishes between intrinsic value, instrumental value, and institutional value, emphasising that cultural evaluation should not be reduced to external performance metrics, but understood as a process of co-creating meaning and legitimising institutional practice. From this perspective, the value of cultural assets lies in their entanglement with memory, identity, and historical context—dimensions that cannot be adequately measured by usage statistics or market price alone.

In the case of out-of-print publications, their cultural value unfolds across three dimensions: Literary, as documents of creative experimentation or poetic shifts in specific historical moments; Historical, as carriers of political context and linguistic practice; Symbolic, as vehicles of collective memory and identity. Only a layered and interdisciplinary approach to evaluation can effectively capture their complex cultural positioning.

From Performance Metrics to Cultural Governance: A Shift in Evaluation Paradigms

Historically, cultural impact assessment has relied heavily on quantitative indicators such as visitor numbers, web traffic, and economic returns. However, contemporary cultural policy is increasingly shifting from a logic of accountability to one of cultural governance, prioritising multi-stakeholder engagement, value co-production, and institutional transparency (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). This shift has not only

redefined how cultural assets are managed, but has also opened space for new forms of cultural evaluation.

The Cultural Value Project, led by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), advocates for approaches that emphasise qualitative narratives, in-depth feedback, and long-term observation in capturing the social impact of cultural practices (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). Similarly, Australia's Culture Counts platform develops tripartite feedback mechanisms that involve audiences, creators, and policymakers in the construction of cultural value. These initiatives suggest that cultural impact should not be measured solely by outputs, but rather by the institutional and social processes through which cultural meaning is generated and shared.

In the governance of literary heritage, out-of-print publications often exist at the margins due to limited circulation and ambiguous rights status. Bowrey (2021) contends that the value of cultural assets is never "natural" but always constructed through legal norms, property regimes, and institutional perspectives. In copyright-dominated cultural systems, who has the right to interpret or use a work often determines whether that work becomes culturally visible. This insight serves as a critical reminder for literature museums developing open access policies and directly informs the evaluative framework of this study, which is concerned not only with "what value is" but also with "who is allowed to create and activate value."

Open Data and the Digital Logic of Public Culture

Within the broader context of cultural value governance, open data has become a key mechanism for advancing cultural publicness. The Open GLAM movement (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) advocates that digital resources created by public cultural institutions should be considered public goods—freely accessible, unrestricted, and reusable by all (OpenGLAM, n.d.). This principle has been incorporated into international cultural policy initiatives and platform design, including UNESCO's Culture|2030 Indicators and the Europeana digital infrastructure.

Open data not only facilitates the circulation of cultural knowledge but also strengthens the role of cultural institutions as pillars of social support during times of crisis. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, digitised and open-access resources became vital for sustaining education and cultural engagement, reinforcing the idea of museums as components of a resilient society (Brunnermeier, 2022). However, open access also presents challenges related to copyright clearance, metadata standards, and platform infrastructure. For singular literary artefacts such as *Le Moulin No. 3*, whose rights status is uncertain, opening access entails not only legal questions but also complex negotiations over institutional responsibility and the redistribution of cultural value.

This chapter argues that cultural evaluation should move beyond performance-based metrics toward a model grounded in multi-dimensional value and public-oriented logic—especially in the case of rare literary artefacts that exist at the edges of institutional systems. The theoretical groundwork laid here will serve as the foundation for the next chapter’s case analysis and subsequent framework construction, offering literature museums a renewed basis for value-making amid the demands of digital transformation.

Case Study: The History, Interpretation, and Reuse Dilemma of *Le Moulin No. 3*

As the only surviving physical copy of the literary magazine *Le Moulin No. 3* in Taiwan, this publication is not only a rare document in literary history but also a material record of poetic experimentation and intellectual resistance by young poets during the Japanese colonial period. In terms of its content, form, and publishing context, *Le Moulin No. 3* reflects the efforts of Taiwanese intellectuals to assert linguistic freedom and aesthetic autonomy within a constrained colonial structure (Wang, 2001). Since its donation to the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL) by relatives of one of the contributors in 2003, the magazine has been regarded as a significant research resource and cultural symbol. In 2013, it was officially designated as a “Significant Antiquity” by Taiwan’s Bureau of Cultural Heritage, thereby receiving legal protection under national cultural heritage law. However, despite NMTL’s successful digitisation of each page and multiple public exhibitions, the legal and institutional status of *Le Moulin No. 3* has prevented its inclusion in open access platforms and it remains excluded from all current cultural value or impact assessment frameworks (Bowrey, 2021).

Historical and Literary Context

The *Le Moulin* poetry magazine was founded by the *Le Moulin* Poetry Society in Tainan in 1933. Its members were young Taiwanese poets educated under the Japanese colonial system and strongly influenced by French Symbolism and Surrealism. The society published a total of four issues of the magazine and two collective anthologies. Only the third issue, published in December 1934, survives today. This issue includes poetry, essays, and literary commentary. It is marked by highly experimental features, with a hybrid linguistic style that blends Chinese, Japanese, and occasional French vocabulary—demonstrating an explicit translingual literary aspiration and reflecting the cultural positioning and linguistic strategies of Taiwanese intellectuals in a colonial context (Huang, 2006).

It is estimated that only 75 copies of the third issue were originally printed. Its cover design, layout, and typography were all executed by the members themselves, giving the publication significant documentary

rarity and artistic value. Its importance in literary history stems not only from its content, but also from its act of publication itself—representing a form of cultural practice that embodied the ethos of “poetry as a language of resistance.” In doing so, it captured the literary ideals and collective memory of a segment of Taiwan’s colonial-era intellectuals (Nora, 1989).

Institutional Position and Rights Dilemmas

Since its donation to the NMTL in 2003, *Le Moulin No. 3* has undergone preservation and digitisation work. Beginning in 2005, both the physical copy and digital images have been used in exhibitions and educational programmes. However, as the magazine was published in 1934 without any formal copyright declaration or registration, and given that copyright terms in Taiwan may not yet have expired, its legal status remains ambiguous. Furthermore, the identities of several contributors or their heirs are difficult to trace. As a result, NMTL has only made low-resolution images available on its official website but has not labelled the work as “open data” under public access guidelines (Open GLAM, n.d.).

Due to this lack of clarity regarding authorship and legal boundaries, there is currently no definite timeline for when *Le Moulin No. 3* might enter the public domain or be made fully accessible. Even though the magazine is recognised as a protected cultural asset, the legal responsibility for its textual and image content remains undefined—underscoring the disjunction between heritage protection law and copyright governance in the context of literary artefacts (Bowrey, 2021).

Barriers to Cultural Reuse

Although *Le Moulin No. 3* has been mentioned frequently in exhibitions and scholarly publications, its practical reuse faces a range of institutional and technical barriers. First, although the museum holds high-quality digitised files, it cannot release them under any open licensing mechanism, and public access is restricted to limited browsing. Second, as the publication involves multiple authors, there is no collective copyright agreement or documented list of heirs, making the initiation of rights clearance nearly impossible. Finally, in the absence of an applicable cultural value assessment framework, relevant departments lack the justification to prioritise its reuse or inclusion in open access policies (Holden, 2006; O’Brien, 2010).

In short, while the rarity and cultural significance of *Le Moulin No. 3* are acknowledged within Taiwan’s heritage designation system, the lack of a practical reuse framework and mechanisms for inter-institutional collaboration renders it functionally inert. This case exemplifies a broader dilemma in contemporary cultural governance: assets of high symbolic value may exist within institutions, yet remain “locked” due

to structural limitations—highlighting what Throsby (2001) calls the paradox of cultural value that cannot be activated.

Constructing an Evaluation Framework and Its Application

Drawing on the unique characteristics of the case of *Le Moulin No. 3*, this chapter proposes a dual-track framework for evaluating the cultural value and reuse potential of out-of-print literary publications. The framework underscores that literary heritage is not only historically and aesthetically significant but should also be assessed in terms of its public impact and regenerative potential. In contrast to traditional static evaluation models—often centred on physical preservation, rarity, or date—this framework advances two dynamic dimensions: cultural value and public impact, each accompanied by four practical indicators. These serve as a tool for cultural institutions seeking to bring rare literary materials into open access systems.

Design Principles of the Framework

This evaluative model is built upon the integration of three conceptual pillars:

Cultural Value Theory: Following Throsby (2001) and Holden (2004, 2006), cultural assets are recognised for their non-market values, including symbolic meaning, historical memory, and institutional legitimacy. This reinforces the idea that not all value can or should be measured economically.

Cultural Governance and Open Data Practice: Drawing from Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) and the Open GLAM initiative (n.d.), the model shifts the evaluative emphasis from questions of preservation alone to whether collections can become participatory and open resources for diverse publics.

Trends in Digital Cultural Policy: Informed by UNESCO (2019) and Europeana, the model includes variables such as licensing clarity, digital infrastructure, and platform accessibility to reflect the evolving realities of heritage institutions.

These principles collectively support a move away from custodianship toward cultural co-creation, where heritage is reactivated and reinterpreted in public-facing contexts.

Evaluation Dimensions and Indicators

The model is organised across two primary dimensions, each with four indicators:

This framework is not intended for quantitative scoring but as a qualitative tool to guide policy, institutional prioritisation, and cultural dialogue.

Stakeholder Perspectives in Cultural Reuse

In addition to the cultural value and public impact of rare literary assets, the perspectives of multiple stakeholders must be incorporated into the reuse conversation. Each brings a unique set of interests, values, and potential risks:

Collectors and bibliophiles may resist digitisation due to concerns over value dilution or exclusivity.

Authors and heirs (if traceable) often seek control over representation and attribution.

Cultural institutions, such as the National Museum of Taiwan Literature and its Collections Committee, must navigate between preservation, law, and public service.

Publishers, whether historical or contemporary, may consider reissuance but must manage copyright and brand positioning.

Researchers depend on high-quality, reliable digitised resources with clear metadata.

Auction markets and private dealers influence the perceived value of cultural materials and often operate in parallel to institutional agendas.

Creative industries (e.g. designers, curators, educators) look to rare materials for reinterpretation and inspiration.

Factoring these interests into any reuse evaluation promotes legitimacy, anticipatory governance, and sustainable collaboration (Holden, 2006).

Application: Le Moulin No. 3

Applying this framework to *Le Moulin No. 3* reveals a nuanced profile:

Historical Significance: Strong. The magazine reflects 1930s Taiwanese literary experimentation during Japanese colonial rule.

Symbolic Resonance: High. It embodies the modernist spirit and intellectual resistance of a generation (Nora, 1989).

Literary Depth: High. Its multilingual, avant-garde style remains a landmark in Taiwanese poetic history (Huang, 2006).

Institutional Visibility: Confirmed. The item has been designated a “Significant Antiquity” by Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture (MoC, 2013).

Rights Clarity: Low. No documented copyright registration; most authors deceased with no heirs traced (Bowrey, 2021).

Digital Accessibility: Moderate. Fully digitised but not openly licensed; only browsable through museum application.

Participatory Potential: Low. Legal ambiguity restricts remixing, reinterpretation, or public co-creation (Open GLAM, n.d.).

Regenerative Potential: High. Rich potential exists for educational and creative reuse, but current frameworks fall short of enabling such transformation.

This analysis illustrates a common paradox: high symbolic value does not guarantee practical accessibility or reuse. Legal opacity and institutional caution frequently inhibit the full public potential of rare works.

From Custodianship to Participatory Governance

The proposed dual-axis framework, supported by stakeholder mapping, offers a robust model for assessing out-of-print literary materials. *Le Moulin No. 3* exemplifies how literary heritage can possess extraordinary value while remaining functionally inaccessible. To bridge this gap, cultural institutions must not only digitise but also clarify rights, improve participatory channels, and align their missions with open cultural governance. Reuse, ultimately, is not a technical matter but a political and ethical one—shaped by power, voice, and infrastructure.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Public Life of Rare Literary Heritage

This study examined the cultural value and reuse potential of out-of-print literary publications through the lens of *Le Moulin No. 3*, a unique artefact held by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature. While such materials are often revered for their rarity, they are frequently excluded from public access due to legal ambiguities, institutional caution, and rigid preservation frameworks. This inquiry argued that literary heritage must be reimagined as living cultural infrastructure, where value is defined not solely by scarcity but by its capacity to engage, educate, and inspire. Drawing on cultural value theory, governance

perspectives, and open access principles, the proposed evaluative framework integrates symbolic meaning, institutional visibility, legal clarity, and participatory potential. By incorporating the viewpoints of key stakeholders—from collectors and heirs to researchers, cultural institutions, and creative practitioners—the framework encourages a shift in cultural policy and institutional practice: from safeguarding to sharing, from possession to participation. To fully realise the public potential of rare literary assets, heritage institutions must adopt inclusive, rights-aware, and digitally enabled strategies that balance cultural integrity with equitable access.

In light of the findings presented in this study, a number of policy directions emerge as vital for fostering the reuse of out-of-print literary heritage. Foremost among these is the need to prioritise the legal clarification of rights, particularly in relation to copyright duration, orphan works, and collective authorship, through sustained legal research and regulatory innovation. Cultural institutions should be encouraged to embed multi-stakeholder consultation mechanisms—engaging authors, heirs, researchers, and creative practitioners—into their decision-making processes concerning digitisation and reuse. At the infrastructural level, national or regional initiatives must be developed to establish metadata standards and scalable digital platforms capable of supporting sustainable and equitable open access. Funding bodies also have a crucial role to play in supporting initiatives that not only conserve fragile materials but also enable their public reinterpretation and circulation. Finally, institutional evaluation protocols should evolve to include qualitative frameworks that acknowledge symbolic, participatory, and educational value, moving beyond quantitative performance indicators as the dominant basis for policy justification.

Looking ahead, the framework proposed in this study invites further empirical validation through comparative application to other forms of rare or marginalised cultural heritage. Expanding the scope to include visual, oral, or indigenous materials held in similarly ambiguous legal and institutional circumstances would deepen our understanding of how rarity and reuse intersect across different contexts. Moreover, transnational case studies involving literature museums, national archives, or grassroots memory institutions could shed light on the varying governance ecologies that enable or inhibit public access. The expanding field of digital humanities also offers fertile ground for methodological advancement, particularly in leveraging computational tools for cultural value mapping, rights traceability, and participatory design. Ultimately, sustaining the cultural life of out-of-print literary works will require not only robust institutional reform but also a renewed ethical commitment to cultural democracy—where the most fragile or obscure materials are afforded opportunities for shared interpretation, creative reuse, and long-term public relevance.

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Museums in Transformation: Analyzing the Contributions of Curatorship and Digital Humanities in Impact Assessment Models

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ABSTRACT

Museums are undergoing significant digital transformation, expanding their reach and modes of engagement. However, traditional impact assessment models often fall short in capturing the full spectrum of value generated, particularly concerning digital initiatives, data preservation, and participatory practices. This study investigates how integrating Digital Curation (DC) and Digital Humanities (DH) can enhance impact assessment. Through a qualitative, comparative analysis of established international approaches – including frameworks and standards like the Europeana, SoPHIA, inDICEs, MOII, CSIRO and ISO 16687:2025 – this paper identifies critical gaps in current methodologies. It argues that DC provides essential principles for managing the information lifecycle, while DH offers robust methods for analysing digital engagement. The paper proposes the IAM-CDH, a multidimensional framework integrating five core dimensions and 45 specific indicators, designed to offer a more holistic, ethical, and sustainable evaluation that reinforces museums' societal relevance in the digital age.

Keywords:

Impact
Assessment,
Museums, Digital
curation, Digital
humanities

Introduction

Cultural heritage institutions, particularly museums, are navigating a paradigm shift driven by a profound digital transformation. No longer mere repositories of tangible heritage, they are evolving into proactive agents of social change, tasked with promoting education, inclusion, and active citizenship in an increasingly networked society. This evolution was formally recognized in the 2022 ICOM museum definition, which redefined the museum's core mission as being "*in the service of society*" – a role fulfilled by becoming "*accessible and inclusive*" fostering "*diversity and sustainability*" and ensuring "*the participation of communities*" (Garlandini, 2022), marking a shift from a collection-centric focus to a user-centred, participatory model where publics are engaged as co-creators of knowledge and meaning (Nikolaou, 2024).

Underpinning this evolution is a theoretical shift that reconceptualizes the museum object as "information-as-thing" elevating the role of Digital Curation from a technical task to a core institutional mission (Latham, 2012). Furthermore, the transformation is a political priority, with the EU's Horizon Europe programme identifying the need for "*new, participatory management models, including for museums*" and investment in "*high quality digitisation and curation of digital heritage assets*" alongside the need for collaborative digital infrastructures for heritage, addressing the urgent demand for more digital skills in the sector, and fostering research on "*the accessibility of culture and social inclusion*" (European Commission, 2021, 2023).

This evolving context presents a significant challenge. The official EU's discourse has shifted from "preservation" and "access" to "digital transformation" requiring a re-evaluation of how impact is measured (Uzelac & Higgins, 2025). There is an urgent need for assessment frameworks that overcome traditional limitations by critically integrating the challenges posed by massive digitization, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the participatory paradigms of Culture 3.0, and the need for a "digital sustainability" that transcends mere preservation to encompass ethical management and equitable access (Tartari et al., 2023; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025). Conventional impact assessment models, often focused on quantifiable metrics like visitor numbers or direct economic returns, prove insufficient to capture the complexity of the value generated by contemporary museums. They frequently overlook the impacts of digital initiatives and the long-term value of digital preservation. This gap hinders institutions from robustly demonstrating their societal relevance and securing their legitimacy in a competitive funding landscape (Ochôa & Pinto, 2024; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025).

This paper therefore addresses the central research question: *What are the contributions of Digital Curation (DC) and Digital Humanities (DH) to the reconfiguration and enrichment of impact assessment models in museums?* This study argues that the integration of DC, with its focus on the entire lifecycle of digital information, and DH, with its advanced analytical and participatory methodologies, is essential for developing a more holistic and accurate evaluation framework. By

critically analysing six prominent international approaches to impact assessment, this paper identifies their limitations and builds on their strengths to propose an innovative alternative: the *Impact Assessment Model with Digital Curation and Digital Humanities* (IAM-CDH), a framework that integrates digital, participatory, and ethical indicators, offering a tool for the multifaceted reality of the 21st-century museum (Ochôa & Pinto, 2024; Tartari et al., 2023; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025).

Theoretical Foundations: A Paradigm Shift in Museum Evaluation

The need for a new impact assessment model is rooted in two parallel evolutions: the changing definition of “impact” and the transformed role of the museum.

Impact assessment in the cultural sector has evolved from a narrow economic focus in the 1980s towards a multidimensional understanding of value. By the 1990s, pioneering studies catalyzed a paradigm shift by demonstrating how arts and culture foster social cohesion and individual well-being and community empowerment, thus demanding the integration of social impact dimensions (Bollo, 2013; Matarasso, 1997). Today, a holistic approach is sought, integrating social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions, often framed by the *Theory of Change* (ToC): a methodology that maps the causal pathway from an institution's resources and activities (inputs) to its direct, measurable results (outputs), the changes in audience behaviour or knowledge (outcomes), and the long-term societal effects (impacts) (Rogers, 2014). This holistic view is reinforced by the conceptualization of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability, positioning it as a fundamental dimension of sustainable development, shaping values, behaviours, and social innovation. This perspective requires assessment models to measure how museums contribute to cultural vitality, diversity, and intercultural dialogue as core components of a sustainable society (Hawkes, 2001).

Concurrently, the museum's role has shifted, transitioning from a passive repository into a dynamic and dialogic space for co-creation and citizen science, actively engaging communities in the interpretation and production of knowledge (Nikolaou, 2024; Robbins et al., 2021). This transformation is intrinsically linked to a reconceptualization of the museum object itself. Drawing on Michael Buckland's theory (1991), we can understand museum objects – both physical and their digital surrogates – as “*information-as-thing*”. This perspective shifts the object's primary value from its materiality to its informational potential, which is only actualized through processes of curatorship, interpretation, and use (Latham, 2012).

The disciplinary contributions of DC and DH are critically relevant here, offering the necessary tools to manage and interpret this informational value.

- DC provides the principles and practices for managing these digital assets throughout their lifecycle – from creation and preservation to access, use, and transformation –, ensuring their long-term integrity, authenticity, and usability (Higgins, 2018). Advanced lifecycle models, such as the d-KISTI model, emphasize the *active creation of value* over passive preservation (Rhee, 2024).
- DH offers the methodologies and computational tools to analyse, interpret, and visualize the vast informational value unlocked by DC. Through techniques such as data mining, network analysis, and interactive platforms, DH allows for a deeper understanding of digital engagement and facilitates new, often participatory, forms of scholarly inquiry and public interaction with cultural heritage (Schreibman, 2012; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025).

The synergy between DC and DH provides the foundation for an impact assessment model that can adequately measure the value generated by museums in the digital age, moving beyond outdated metrics to capture the impact of well-curated information and meaningful participation (Ochôa & Pinto, 2024).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, and constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that “impact” is a socially constructed concept whose meaning varies by context. The research design is exploratory, using a comparative case study analysis supported by in-depth documentary analysis. The research is guided by a conceptual model that maps the core components of the investigation and their interactions, illustrating how the traditional dimensions of museum impact (cultural, social, economic) are mediated and enhanced by the integration of DC and DH. DC is positioned as a *foundational process* that manages the entire lifecycle of digital assets, while DH provides the *analytical and participatory* tools to generate new knowledge and engagement from those assets.

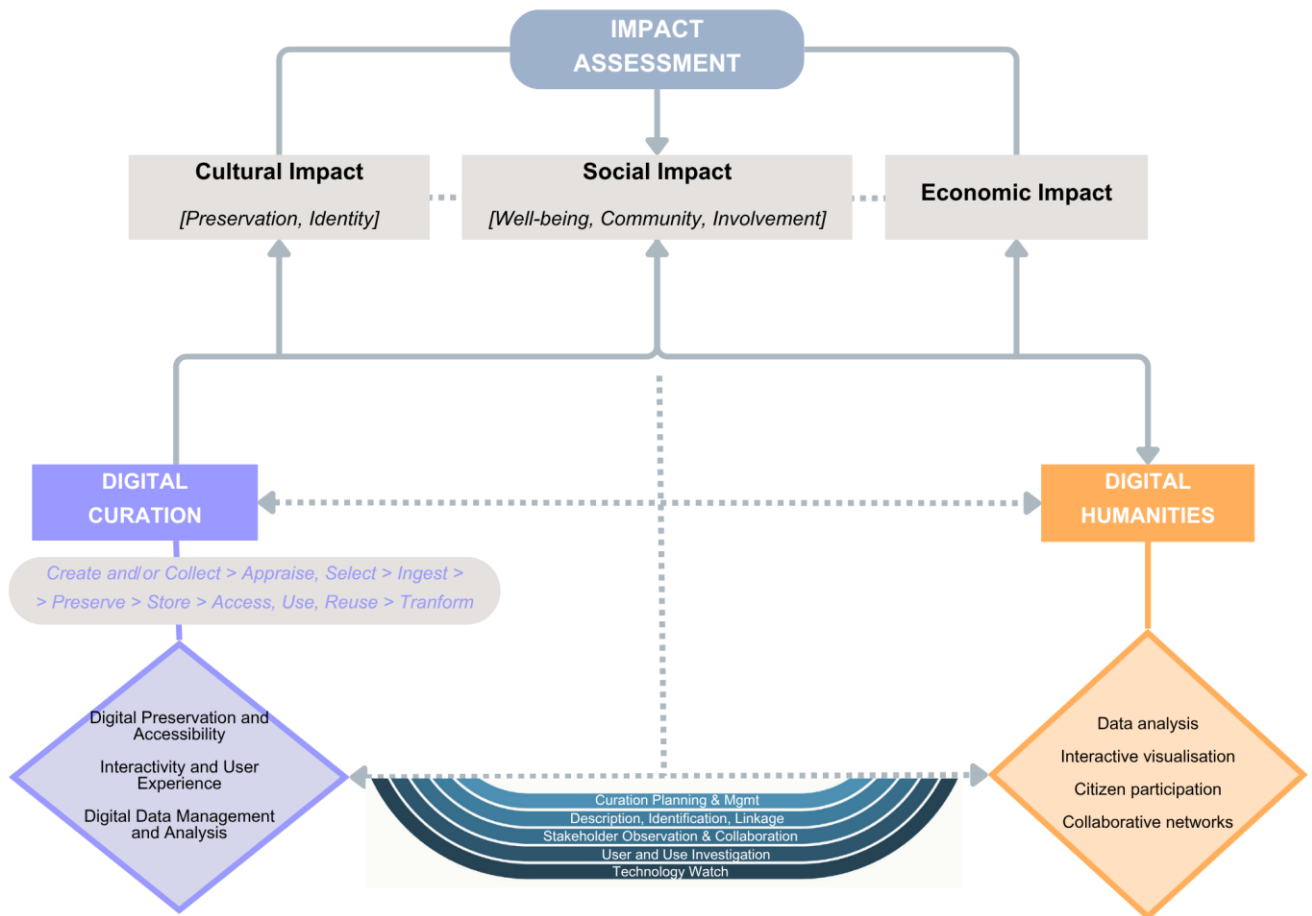


FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE IAM-CDH FRAMEWORK

Source: Own elaboration (adapted from Rhee, 2024)

The methodological process followed an iterative, three-stage structure:

1. *Foundation*: Established the state of the art through a literature review, which informed the selection of cases and the development of analytical criteria;
2. *Development and Analysis*: Six key established international approaches were systematically analysed based on criteria including its methodological approach, evaluated dimensions, theoretical underpinnings, flexibility, and integration of digital and participatory aspects, in order to identify convergences, divergences, and critical gaps;
3. *Synthesis and Proposal*: The findings from the comparative analysis were combined with theoretical insights from DC models (notably d-KISTI) and DH practices to develop the IAM-CDH framework. This involved structuring the model's dimensions and selecting 45 specific, theoretically-grounded indicators.

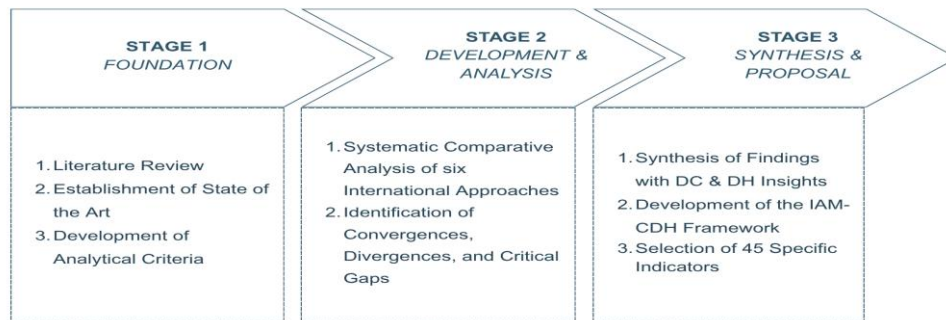


FIGURE 2. ITERATIVE PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Source: Own elaboration

This iterative and reflexive methodology ensured that the proposed model is not merely a theoretical construct but a direct response to the identified limitations of current practices, grounded in both established theory and innovative approaches (Busetto et al., 2020; Nicmanis, 2024).

Analysis of Existing Models: A Comparative Overview

The comparative analysis revealed a diverse landscape of approaches, summarized in Table 1.

Model	Primary Goal	Methodological Approach	Key Strengths	Key Limitations
Europeana Impact Playbook (McNeilly et al., 2024; Verwayen et al., 2017)	Evaluate value generated by digital heritage activities	Flexible, qualitative, participatory, narrative-focused	Strong on digital impact, stakeholder engagement, ToC	Can be resource-intensive, less standardized
ISO 16687:2025 <i>Impact assessment for museums</i> (International Organization for Standardization, 2025)	Standardize museum impact assessment globally	Normative, quantitative, fixed procedures	High comparability and rigor, useful for formal reporting	Low flexibility, limited capture of contextual nuances and digital specifics

2025a, 2025b; Ochôa & Pinto, 2024)				
MOI! <i>Museums of Impact</i> (MOI! Museums of Impact, 2022)	Facilitate internal self-assessment for social impact	Holistic, qualitative, focused on organizational learning	Strong on social impact, continuous improvement, internal capacity building	Limited external comparability, less focus on digital metrics
SoPHIA <i>Social Platform for Holistic Impact Heritage Assessment</i> (SoPHIA, 2021; Wollentz, 2023)	Provide a holistic, multidimensional assessment	Hybrid (normative and participatory), co-creative	Comprehensive (social, cultural, economic, environmental), strong stakeholder focus	High qualitative component can make measurement complex
inDICES <i>Change Impact Assessment Framework</i> (Tartari et al., 2023)	Measure the impact of digital transformation in Cultural and Creative Industries	Innovative, data-driven, focused on digital metrics	Strong on digital innovation, participation, and new technologies (AI)	Requires high technical expertise, less focus on traditional social/cultural impact
CSIRO <i>Impact Evaluation Guide</i> (CSIRO, 2024)	Rigorously evaluate the impact of scientific research	Quantitative, based on value chains and causal analysis	Methodologically robust, strong on economic and environmental impact	Complex, data-intensive, less adaptable to intangible cultural value

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT MODELS

Source: Own elaboration

The analysis shows that these instruments can be broadly grouped. On one hand, frameworks like the *Europeana Impact Playbook* and *SoPHIA* prioritize flexible, qualitative, and participatory methods that excel at capturing contextual value. On the other hand, the prescriptive ISO 16687:2025 standard and the *CSIRO guide* prioritize standardization and causal analysis, which ensures comparability but can miss the nuances of cultural and digital transformation. Finally, specialized tools like *MOI!* and *inDICES* focus on internal organizational learning and the specific impacts of digital participation and transformation, respectively.

Persistent Challenges in Impact Assessment

Despite their individual strengths, the analysis revealed four persistent challenges that limit the effectiveness of current approaches in the digital era:

1. *Measuring Significant Digital Change:* Most models struggle to move beyond simple *output* metrics (e.g., website visits, number of digitized items) to assess deeper *outcomes* and *impacts*, such as the quality of online engagement, the value generated from data reuse, or the acquisition of new skills;
2. *Lack of a Systematic Approach to Ethics:* While data privacy is mentioned, there is a general absence of integrated frameworks for assessing the ethical governance of data, algorithmic transparency, and the potential biases of AI in the cultural sector;
3. *An Incomplete View of Sustainability:* The cultural pillar of sustainability is often implicit rather than a core dimension. Furthermore, the environmental impact of digital infrastructures themselves – an often-invisible ecological cost – is rarely considered;
4. *Proving Long-Term Impact:* Attributing long-term societal change unequivocally to a specific museum intervention remains one of the greatest methodological hurdles for the entire field.

These limitations highlight the need for a new approach that systematically integrates the value generated by digital and participatory practices, while also being pragmatic and oriented towards continuous improvement.

The comparative analysis, therefore, serves not only to identify these persistent challenges but also to highlight the significant strengths that each framework offers. The proposed IAM-CDH model is a synthesis that builds upon the foundational contributions of these approaches. It is inspired by the importance of narrative construction and the participatory ethos found in flexible models like the Europeana Impact Playbook and SoPHIA. It incorporates the methodological rigor and focus on causality from normative approaches like ISO 16687 and the CSIRO guide. Furthermore, it addresses the critical need for specific metrics for digital transformation and a focus on organizational learning, drawing lessons from innovative frameworks such as inDICES and MOI!. Thus, the IAM-CDH framework is presented as an integrated proposal designed to leverage these collective strengths while systematically addressing the identified gaps.

Foundations for a New Model: The Contributions of DC and DH

Overcoming the identified gaps requires the integration of principles from DC and DH, which provide the theoretical and methodological foundations for a more sophisticated evaluation (Ochôa & Pinto, 2024; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025). A complete assessment model requires a prior step: evaluating the management quality of the digital asset that generates impact. It is here that the contributions of DC and DH become fundamental.

Digital Curation and the Creation of Informational Value

DC transcends mere technical preservation (Higgins, 2018). As a continuous process that guarantees the management of digital data throughout its entire lifecycle, from planning to reuse, its quality can be best assessed through a lifecycle model. To assess the quality of a digital asset's management, lifecycle models like d-KISTI Digital Curation Lifecycle Model (Rhee, 2024) are particularly relevant as they focus on the active creation of value – integrating actions like “Transform”, “Reappraise” and processes focused on value creation – not just passive preservation.

This perspective aligns with the conceptualization of museum objects as “information-as-thing”, whose informational potential is only realized as impact through active curatorship (Latham, 2012). The layers of the d-KISTI model, such as “Curation, Planning and Management”, “Technology Watch”, or “Stakeholder Observation & Collaboration”, function as measurable quality criteria for a museum's digital strategy. A qualified management of the information lifecycle – which ensures the richness of metadata, interoperability (FAIR principles – Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable), and sustainable preservation – is a precondition for digital assets to generate impact. Thus, better assessment leads to better curation, and better curation generates greater and more sustainable impact. Applying impact assessment directly to curatorial practice, informed by this model, creates a “virtuous cycle” (the results of the evaluation are not just a final report, but learnings that allow for the continuous improvement of that same practice).

Digital Humanities as an Analytical and Participatory Vector

DH, in turn, offers the methodologies to analyse and interpret the value generated by curated assets. Its analytical tools – such as text mining of visitor comments to reveal qualitative perceptions, or network analysis to map knowledge dissemination – allow for a more granular understanding of public engagement (Ochôa & Pinto, 2024). Simultaneously, its participatory approaches – citizen science, crowdsourcing, collaborative curation – provide the means not only to foster co-creation but also to analyse the quality and impact of these contributions on enriching museum narratives and strengthening communities, helping to overcome the “participation gap” (Tartari et al., 2023). These approaches, which transform the public into co-creators, are often driven by European Union funding programs like Horizon 2020 that promote collaborative processes of “citizen curation”. Ultimately, these initiatives represent a unique opportunity to democratize access to culture by decentralizing the traditional focus of decision-making from experts to visitors, thereby promoting a plurality of interpretations (Hupperetz, 2022; Marras et al., 2023; Rollo, 2020).

Proposal: The IAM-CDH Framework

In response to the identified gaps, this paper proposes the IAM-CDH. This framework is designed as a hybrid and multidimensional tool that aims to harmonize methodological rigor with contextual flexibility, placing DC and DH at the core of the evaluation process. Its structure is based on a value chain logic informed by the ToC, mapping the path from institutional resources to long-term societal impact. The IAM-CDH is organized around five interconnected thematic dimensions, which provide a holistic lens for assessing a museum's performance.

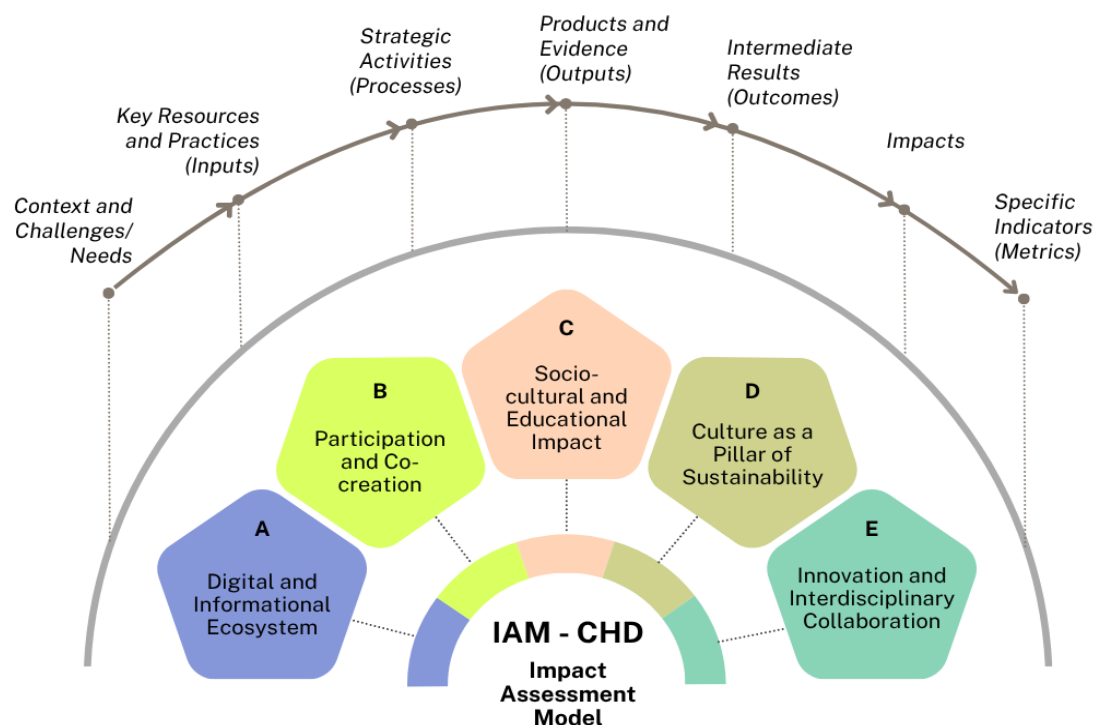


FIGURE 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE IAM-CDH

Source: Own elaboration

The Five Dimensions of the IAM-CDH

1. *Digital and Informational Ecosystem*: Assesses the quality, ethics, and sustainability of the museum's digital assets. Driven by DC and DH, it moves beyond simple access metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of curatorial practices through indicators on metadata quality (FAIR principles) and the ethical governance of data and AI. Its focus is on the responsibility and integrity of the informational ecosystem the museum builds.

2. *Participation and Co-Creation*: Measures the transition of the public from spectator to co-creator. Empowered by DH methods, its indicators assess the quality of engagement in participatory initiatives (e.g., crowdsourcing, citizen science projects) and their tangible impact on knowledge production, such as co-created exhibitions and publications. This is operationalized through specific digital tools, such as online platforms for crowdsourced transcription of historical documents or collaborative mapping projects where communities add their own stories and memories to museum collections.
3. *Sociocultural and Educational Impact*: Addressing the museum's core social mission, this dimension evaluates the promotion of diversity, inclusion, well-being, and social cohesion. It specifically measures the development of digital and informational literacy, analysing how DC ensures equitable access to quality information and how DH tools can assess the capacity of museum programs to capacitate audiences for a critical, creative, and safe interaction with heritage in an inclusive digital ecosystem.
4. *Culture as a Pillar of Sustainability*: Frames the museum's activities within a holistic sustainability paradigm, evaluating the safeguarding of heritage, the promotion of cultural diversity and artistic vitality, and the environmental sustainability of both physical and digital operations, using DC to measure the often-overlooked ecological impact of technological infrastructure like servers and data storage, thus making the environmental footprint of digital heritage a core component of the assessment (Tansey, 2024; Uzelac & Higgins, 2025).
5. *Innovation and Interdisciplinary Collaboration*: Measures the museum's capacity to innovate and act as a catalyst in the broader creative and knowledge ecosystem. It assesses the impact of strategic partnerships and the critical application of emerging technologies. Specifically, it measures how DC's open data practices (aligned with Open GLAM principles – movement to open up digital collections from Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums for free reuse) and DH's collaborative networks foster innovation, gauged through tangible outcomes like the reuse of the museum's open data (APIs, datasets) by third parties.

To operationalize this multidimensional approach, the IAM-CDH proposes a set of 45 specific indicators. The following table summarizes the framework's structure, presenting the core dimensions, their sub-dimensions, and an example indicator for each, designed to enhance clarity and practical application.

Dimension	Sub-dimensions	Example of specific indicator
A. Digital & Informational Ecosystem	- Ethical Governance of Data, AI, and Emerging Technologies - Strategic Use of Digital Technologies and Platforms	<i>Existence and application of policies on privacy, ethical data</i>

	• Digitisation, Curation and Management of Collections and Metadata • Ethical Data Governance and Emerging Technologies • Sustainable Digital Preservation and Long-Term Accessibility • Data Reuse and Impact on Research/Teaching	• <i>use, and informed consent (GDPR compliance).</i> • <i>Level of transparency regarding the use of AI systems and mitigation of algorithmic bias.</i>
B. Participation & Co-Creation	• Collaborative Participation • Impact on Knowledge Production	• <i>Level of active participation and co-creation (e.g., volume of user-generated content, contributions to crowdsourcing/citizen science projects).</i> • <i>Number of co-created outputs (e.g., exhibitions, publications) resulting from participation.</i>
C. Sociocultural & Educational Impact	• Public Involvement • Inclusion and Accessibility • Development of Digital and Information Skills	• <i>Number and impact of training programs in digital and informational skills for professionals and the public.</i> • <i>Evidence of diversity in collections and programming, and accessibility compliance (physical and WCAG).</i>
D. Culture as a Pillar of Sustainability	• Safeguarding Heritage and Preserving Cultural Memory and Identity(ies) • Fostering Skills, Knowledge and Artistic-Cultural Vitality • Promoting Cultural Diversity, Intercultural Dialogue and Social Inclusion through Culture • Cultural Governance and Partnerships for Integral Sustainability • Environmental Sustainability of Cultural and Digital Operations	• <i>Assessment of the carbon footprint of digital infrastructures (servers, data storage) and implementation of reduction measures.</i> • <i>Effectiveness of heritage safeguarding policies for physical and digital collections.</i>
E. Innovation & Interdisciplinary Collaboration	• Partnerships and Collaborations • Application of Emerging Technologies • Contribution to Innovation in the Cultural and Creative Sector	• <i>Number of reuses of the museum's open data (APIs, datasets) by third parties (researchers, creative industries, educators).</i> • <i>Number and diversity of active interdisciplinary partnerships (e.g., with universities, tech labs).</i>

TABLE 2. DIMENSIONS, SUB-DIMENSIONS, AND INDICATORS OF THE IAM-CDH FRAMEWORK

Source: Own elaboration

Operationalization and Implementation

While the five dimensions and their underlying value chain logic define *what* the IAM-CDH assesses, its operationalization defines *how* it is applied. The implementation process is designed to be iterative and cyclical – inspired by the learning philosophy of the *Europeana Impact Playbook* (Verwayen et al., 2017) –and is structured in three interdependent macro-stages that transform assessment from a reporting exercise into an engine for continuous organizational learning:

1. *Diagnosis and Strategic Design*: Establishes the context and scope of the evaluation. It involves a situational analysis of the institution, the identification and engagement of key stakeholders, the formulation of clear impact objectives for each IAM-CDH dimension, and the mapping of the “Change Pathway”. This ensures that the assessment is aligned with the museum's mission and resources from the outset. Complementary tools, such as an Impact Canvas, can be used in this planning phase to help structure the initial ideas for each initiative.
2. *Implementation and Systematic Measurement*: Focuses on executing the planned activities and systematically collecting the data needed to assess progress. It involves a hybrid data collection approach, combining quantitative metrics (e.g., digital platform analytics, surveys) with qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, impact narratives). DH methodologies, such as sentiment analysis or social network analysis, can be employed here to process and interpret complex datasets.
3. *Evaluation, Narration, and Continuous Adjustment*: Dedicated to the interpretation of data, the communication of results, and the integration of learnings into future practices. This includes building a compelling “impact narrative” based on the evidence collected and validating the findings with stakeholders. Crucially, the conclusions are used to inform strategic decision-making, adjust programs, and refine the assessment model itself, thus closing the iterative loop and fostering a sustainable culture of evaluation.



FIGURE 4. THE ITERATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF THE IAM-CDH FRAMEWORK

Source: Own elaboration

Conclusion

Traditional impact assessment models are increasingly inadequate to capture the multifaceted, ethical, and digital realities in which museums operate today. As demonstrated in this article, DC and DH offer not only conceptual clarity but also practical methodologies to reconfigure how museums assess and communicate their impact.

The central contribution of this study is the IAM-CDH – a comprehensive, interdisciplinary framework that integrates digital, participatory, and ethical indicators. By focusing on the quality of the informational ecosystem, fostering meaningful participation, embracing sustainability, and promoting innovation, the IAM-CDH responds to the evolving mission of museums in the 21st century. It reframes the fundamental question from *“what is our reach?”* to *“what significant, ethical, and sustainable change have we generated?”*.

To strengthen its applicability, future research should focus on empirically validating the IAM-CDH. This includes conducting pilot studies in diverse museum contexts, applying the model to specific digital initiatives (e.g., participatory platforms, open data projects), and analysing its feasibility and effectiveness in real-world settings. Additionally, there is potential for developing digital tools or

dashboards that streamline indicator monitoring and support data-driven decision-making, particularly useful for small and mid-sized institutions.

Finally, the ethical governance of data and artificial intelligence must remain central to impact assessment. The IAM-CDH seeks to support museums not only in demonstrating value, but in shaping it, turning evaluation into a strategic, reflexive, and transformative practice.

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Digitalization as De-Elitization?

The Impacts of Digital Innovation on the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of digital transformation within cultural institutions, analysing how digitization practices serve as a strategic lever, capable of driving innovation, enhancing accessibility and fostering engagement. Our empirical setting is the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation, a historically elite-oriented institution dedicated to the study and promotion of music and musicology. In 2023, the Foundation launched its digitization laboratory, the LeviDigiLab, as a driver for reputational renewal and audience engagement. Adopting an action research approach combined with qualitative and quantitative data analysis, we examine how the initiatives and partnerships developed within the digital laboratory enabled the Foundation to preserve its cultural heritage while

Keywords:

Digital Transformation,
Cultural Innovation,
Audience Engagement,
Cultural Preservation,

reaching new audiences. However, a critical question arises: does this represent a sustained process of organizational democratization or a transient adaptation? The study contributes to current debates on the democratizing potential of digital innovation in the cultural sector.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, digitalization has emerged as a fundamental driver of renewal for cultural institutions. It is no longer merely a technological opportunity linked to heritage preservation, but rather a structural transformation capable of reshaping access methods, forms of participation, and organizational sustainability (Marras, 2019). According to data from the Digital Innovation Observatories (2023), more than 80% of Italian cultural institutions surveyed in 2023 had developed digital content accessible either partially or exclusively online. Additionally, over 70% had integrated digital tools - such as QR codes, audio guides, and interactive touchscreens - to enhance visitor experiences. These figures clearly indicated that digital innovation is no longer an optional accessory, but a functional necessity for institutional relevance and contemporary cultural engagement.

Platforms such as Europeana and Google Arts & Culture further demonstrate the potential of digital infrastructures to foster inclusivity, broaden access, and democratize cultural heritage (Sood, 2021; EPRS, 2020). However, this necessary digital transformation remains uneven (Borin & Donato, 2023): small and medium sized cultural institutions frequently face systemic challenges, such as limited funding and human resources, which hinder their ability to plan and implement a coherent digitization strategy.

This paper investigates how smaller cultural institutions can strategically leverage digital transformation to redefine their institutional identity, expand accessibility and initiate a process of “de-elitization” - namely, rethinking its mission as a cultural organization at the service of a broader public than a specialistic niche audience. Our empirical setting is the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation in Venice, an institution historically dedicated to music and musicology and deeply rooted in the intellectual and cultural traditions of twentieth century Venice. Founded in 1962 in accordance with the testamentary wishes of Ugo Levi and Olga Brunner, the Foundation is housed in Palazzo Giustinian Lolin. The building had already become a vibrant cultural salon by the 1930s, frequented by the Venetian bourgeoisie and notable figures from the international literary and musical scenes (Busetto, 2013; Milner, 2003). Despite preserving a valuable cultural heritage - including an important musicological library and an archival collection of musical manuscripts - the Foundation has long remained a niche institution, accessible primarily to scholars and specialists. It is within this context that the LeviDigiLab was launched in 2023, a laboratory for the digitalization of the Foundation’s cultural heritage. The project not only generated new digital content but also initiated a comprehensive organizational rethinking, with tangible impacts on internal structure, communication, staff competencies, and the institution’s external image. This transformation unfolded in a context in

which, as Garlandini (2021) emphasizes, cultural and creative industries must respond swiftly to social and technological changes in order to remain relevant in today's cultural landscape. In this sense, digitalization is not merely a functional tool but a catalyst for cultural innovation, capable of redefining missions, languages, and ways of engaging with the public.

The objective of this research is to analyze how the introduction of digital technologies has transformed the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation in terms of content accessibility, audience composition and engagement, and institutional identity. The study adopts an action research approach combined with qualitative and descriptive quantitative analysis. The quantitative data regarding in person visitors and events has been collected by the Foundation's personnel throughout the years; whereas data associated with digital activities has been gathered by early analytics related to the LEVIData, the digital archive of the Levi Foundation (<https://levidata.fondazionelevi.it/>). While these data remain limited and not yet systematically gathered by the Foundation, they provide an indicative snapshot of the initial outcomes of the digitization process. The qualitative analysis is based on over five hours of semi-structured interviews with Foundation staff, focused on three key themes: organizational change, the internal perceptions of the institution's strengths and challenges, and the impact of the digitization laboratory. Ultimately, the action research approach (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) allowed for a dynamic interplay between theoretical reflection and practical implementation. Within this framework, two strategic interventions were developed collaboratively with the Foundation: a public workshop regarding the identity of the Levi Foundation and the future implications of digital transformation in the cultural sector, organized at the end of March 2025; and a participatory educational program which involved university students in the creation of new communication artifacts reflecting the Foundation's evolving identity. These initiatives share a common goal: to leverage digitalization as a strategic tool for opening up, narrating, and transforming institutional identity, while reaffirming the Levi Foundation's role within the cultural landscape of Venice and beyond.

This research was part of a broader 18 month FSE funded project on archival digitization, coordinated by IUAV University of Venice and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, which aimed to develop and assess methods and tools for improving cultural valorization strategies. Within this framework, the present study offers a reflective contribution on the impact of digitization initiatives on audience growth and diversification. More broadly, it interrogates the role of digital technologies not only as internal catalysts for institutional renewal, but as external instruments for reshaping relationships with communities, audiences, and contemporary cultural landscape.

Case study: The Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation towards a cultural democratization of its legacy

The Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation is an internationally renowned cultural institution in the Venetian panorama that, since 1962, has been devoted to the study and promotion of music and musicology. Founded following the testamentary wishes of the Levi couple (Milner, 2008), the Foundation embodies the legacy of a Jewish bourgeois family, influential for the economic and cultural growth of the city of Venice, and deeply passionate about music and culture. Without heirs, Ugo and Olga Levi dedicated their entire lives to music, collecting manuscripts, books and scores and creating in their residence, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, a musical and literary salon. Between the Tens and the Forties of the XX century (Zorzi, 1994), the building became a vital point for Italian and international culture, gathering in one place prominent and influential figures of the time, discussing music, art and culture, and developing cultural projects (Busetto, 2013; Milner, 2003).

In the Sixties, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin became the official residence of the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation, reinforcing the strong bond with the Venetian musical heritage thanks to its proximity to other prestigious cultural institutions such as the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory, La Fenice theatre, the Marciana Library, and the Luigi Nono Archive. In 1986, in memory of the first Foundation's presidents, the Gianni Milner Library opened its doors to the public with 40.000 volumes and numerous personal collections (Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation). This marked a step towards a great public accessibility, though it remained primarily targeted at scholars and professionals in the field. In 1992, the current president, Giorgio Busetto, assumed his presidency at the Levi Foundation, consolidating the economic sustainability of the institution and developing a strategy which combined the valorization of the past, the strengthening of the present, and a forward-looking vision for the future (Busetto, 2018).

However, over the past decade the Levi Foundation faced significant challenges. As gathered from the interviews, the primary challenge of the Foundation concerns its economic sustainability. Currently, the main source of revenue comes from renting out its property spaces. The Levi Foundation thus uses the remaining space to host the library and the offices, while the great majority of public events, concerts and talks are hosted by other partners both in Venice and abroad. However, such revenues are no longer sufficient to sustain the institution's cultural activities. Due to the depletion of rentable spaces, the limited access to public and private fundings, and the inability to transform cultural initiatives into additional sources of incomes, the Levi Foundation is now confronted with an economical crisis. This situation is further compounded by a cultural offering that is tailored to musicology scholars. This enables the Foundation to serve as a prestigious center for these topics at an international level but also limits its audience to experts in the field and academics. Despite recent efforts to broaden its offerings, including initiatives related to film music, the focus on musicology contributes to maintaining the Foundation at a certain distance from the interests of a larger audience. Consequently, as stated by the Foundation's staff, the public often hesitates to engage with the institution's events, perceiving it as an elitist and niche institution.

Recently, the Foundation addressed these issues through a process of strategic repositioning, focusing on digital innovation as a leverage for cultural democratization. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the access to physical spaces was limited, a new digital strategy was implemented to adapt to the evolving demands of cultural communication and engagement. This process started with the establishment of official social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This marked a shift from traditional press-based communication systems towards digital platforms, promoting initiatives and projects more dynamically. According to the communication staff, the Instagram account underwent a strategic plan aimed at enhancing the Foundation's institutional reputation, resulting in a follower base predominantly composed of cultural and academic institutions. Conversely, Facebook has attracted a more diverse audience, reflecting the platform's broader demographic reach. To further connect with the public, the Foundation launched a YouTube series titled "*Levi recounts itself*" ("*La Levi si racconta*"). This series, comprising 28 videos features experts and Foundation personnel sharing insights into their work and research, highlighting key projects, and exploring the Foundation's library. These initiatives played a pivotal role in demystifying the Foundation's digital offering, while fostering engagement with a broader public. In addition to its social media activities, in more recent years, the Levi Foundation official website was completely redesigned. Now, it is possible for users to access new digital initiatives, while navigating through a more visually appealing and user-friendly platform. Foremost among these initiatives, there is the LEVIData, an institutional database launched in 2015 to provide digital access to portions of the Foundation's extensive archival collection. Since 2022, the LEVIData project has undergone a substantial transformation, catalyzed by the establishment of the LeviDigiLab. This state-of-the-art digitization laboratory was developed following a proposal by the archivist Giulia Clera and became operational in 2023. The laboratory is equipped with three custom-designed scanners developed in collaboration with the Made in Heritage, a network of Italian enterprises which works on digitizing cultural heritage, representing a key milestone in the Foundation's digital transformation journey. The LeviDigiLab's objectives are multifaceted, encompassing the preservation, accessibility and valorization of cultural assets, while improving its visibility and institutional reputation, to foster new audiences and strengthen its network of collaborations. By integrating digital innovation into its core processes, the Levi Foundation seeks to redefine its role as a contemporary cultural institution while maintaining its commitments to its historical legacy.

Research results

The digitization process initiated in 2023 through the implementation of the LeviDigiLab has led to significant transformations within the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation. Foremost among these is the digital production of archival content, now hosted on a dedicated digital repository: the LEVIData. Originally conceived in 2015, this platform has recently been restructured to become more accessible

and functional - not only for scholars conducting musicological research, but also for broader audiences interested in related cultural, historical, and artistic themes. To date, LEVIData contains 5.541 digitized items, with over 250.000 individual digital scans produced. This initiative has resulted in the creation of a hybrid archive - no longer accessible exclusively to on-site visitors, but available to a global digital audience, anytime and from anywhere.

Quantitative data retrieved from Google Analytics for the period July 2024 to July 2025 offer insights into digital user behavior and engagement with the platform (<https://levidata.fondazionelevi.it/>). Of particular note is the number of new users recorded over the past year: 14.556, a promising figure considering the archive's size and the project's early development stage. While most users are based in Italy, the platform also attracts international visitors, particularly from the United States, Singapore, and Germany.

The average session duration is 1 minute and 18 seconds, a number that should not be interpreted negatively. When compared with Europeana's 2024 report on digital users, which recorded almost 4 million visitors and an average session duration of 1 minute and 51 seconds (Europeana, 2024). The relatively short session time may also indicate that users are efficiently locating the resources they need, as the most frequently accessed pages are individual digital records. This suggests a high degree of navigational clarity and usability of the platform. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that available data covered only the past 12 months. Given the recent establishment of the LeviDigiLab, ongoing monitoring of these metrics will be essential to develop a more longitudinal understanding of the laboratory's impact on digital engagement and institutional outreach.

While the digital dimension is already yielding meaningful results, the most transformative effects of digitalization have been observed in the Foundation's on-site activities. Here, digitalization has acted as a catalyst for redefining the institution's identity: from a traditional academic center to a hybrid cultural hub, capable of attracting new audiences and forging collaborations with both local and international partners. In the first year of the LeviDigiLab's full operation, the Foundation's library recorded 260 in person visitors, compared to 153 the previous year. While it cannot be conclusively stated that digitalization alone generated this increase, according to interviews with Foundation staff, the laboratory has significantly enhanced the institution's visibility and reputation, becoming a recognized center for innovation and cultural exchange. Moreover, initiatives related to digitalization began being organized as part of the Foundation cultural programming. This is the case of a series of professional workshops co-organized with Made in Heritage and Lyra srl during the 2023-2024 period. These workshops focused on the tools and best practices of digitalization and were aimed at training cultural sector professionals. The program reached almost 300 participants, both in person and online. Additionally, workshops recordings published on the Foundation's YouTube channel garnered more than one thousand views from all the recordings (Data retrieved from the Levi Foundation YouTube Channel, on 07/07/2025).

Moreover, as part of this research project, and following an action research approach, two initiatives were co-developed between the participating universities and the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation. These projects were designed to increase the Foundation's visibility, diversify its audience base, and experiment with new practices and content production methods.

The first initiative was the research dissemination event "*New Digital Skills for the Cultural Heritage of Archives*" ("*Nuove competenze digitali per il patrimonio culturale degli archivi*"), held on March 28, 2025, at the Levi Foundation and organized by IUAV University of Venice in collaboration with Ca' Foscari University. This event provided a platform to present the results of the FSE research project, focusing on the work carried out within the Foundation's digitization laboratory. Additionally, it served as a reflective space to discuss with other institutions about the potentials and implications of cultural digitization. The workshop featured 25 speakers from 10 different cultural and academic institutions, including the National Central Library of Rome, the National Central Library of Florence, the Ricordi Historical Archive, and the M9 Museum. This gathering contributed to strengthening a critical cultural network, essential for the long-term sustainability of the sector. Participants engaged in discussions on the current challenges facing archives and libraries, and on the promises and limitations of digital technologies in cultural heritage management. The event attracted an in-person audience of 44 attendees, while the video recordings published on the Levi Foundation's YouTube channel surpassed 100 views (Data retrieved from the Levi Foundation YouTube Channel, on 07/07/2025). Although the direct impact on audience engagement was limited - primarily attracting experts and academics from diverse fields of research such as archival design, digitization, and cultural management - the initiative had a more substantial effect on institutional visibility. This enhanced visibility can itself be considered a strategic asset, contributing positively to the broader process of audience engagement and institutional renewal.

The second initiative involved the participation of the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation as a case study for the 2025 edition of the Minor in Artistic Management, a program organized by Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Each year, the course guides university students through a process of cultural design focused on a specific institution, encouraging them to propose changes to its organizational culture through the languages of storytelling, video, and theatre. The Levi Foundation was selected due to its strategic need to engage a younger audience segment, while simultaneously offering students a unique opportunity to explore and reinterpret a historic cultural institution in Venice during its critical phase of transformation. The program engaged 15 university students from the age of 20 to 23 and with different academic backgrounds, supported by six faculty members and professionals specializing in the three selected languages. Over the course of 75 hours of training, students not only delve into the case of the Levi Foundation but also developed skills in organizational models, co-design methodologies, and cultural storytelling. The outcome of the program included: 15 written essays interpreting the identity and mission of the Foundation; 11 pitch presentations envisioning its potential as an innovative cultural hub; 3 videos portraying the Foundation's heritage - interweaving

the silence of Venetian alleyways, the music flowing from manuscripts, and the noise of digital commodification; and a final live performance narrating the story of the Levi couple and their bond with the city of Venice. These creative outputs were showcased during a closing event, “*To Levi’s rhythm*” (“*A ritmo di Levi*”), held at the Levi Foundation on April 30, 2025. The event attracted 47 participants, including many young attendees and international tourists. In addition, the video produced by the students to promote the event and published on the Instagram account of the Artistic Management Minor reached 5.622 views - an important milestone for the Foundation’s visibility. Thus, this initiative had a particularly strong impact on the Foundation’s audience engagement strategy, successfully reaching a previously untapped demographic through practices of cultural co-production and experimentation with contemporary artistic languages.

Collectively, these findings suggest that digitalization is not merely a technical or archival upgrade, but a strategic and cultural shift. It requires how institutional is perceived, both internally and externally, and broadens its capacity to engage diverse publics. At the same time, the experience of the Levi Foundation underlines a crucial challenge: the need to transform short term digital innovation projects into long-term organizational practices, supported by strategic planning, continuous training, and sustainable funding models. In this context, digital becomes not just a tool, but a space of institutional reinvention.

Discussion

This research sets out to demonstrate how digitalization processes can expand the user base of cultural institutions, contributing to the de-elitization of culture. The findings suggest that the digital transformation initiated through the implementation of the LeviDigiLab not only increased access to the Levi Foundation’s cultural heritage - making it globally available - but also succeeded in reaching previously untapped audiences.

As previously mentioned, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, even before becoming the official seat of the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation, was an important meeting place for the Venetian bourgeoisie and national and international intellectuals and artists. This historical role created a clear separation from a more popular and less culturally privileged Venice. Over the decades, this elitist character remained embedded in the Foundation’s spaces, particularly within the library, which was frequented exclusively by musicology experts and academic researchers. This further narrowed the Foundation’s audience base. By the turn of the new millennium, this highly specialized public began to shrink, leaving the Foundation’s spaces increasingly empty. This trend reflected the broader marginalization of narrowly focused disciplines such as musicology and the insufficient diversification of audience engagement strategies.

Today, however, the digitalization laboratory seems to offer a potential response to this decline. The LeviDigiLab has significantly enhanced the Foundation's visibility and reputation through collaborative initiatives with other national and international cultural and academic institutions. These efforts have repositioned the Foundation within the local and national cultural ecosystem. This renewed presence has had a favorable impact on audience engagement by attracting a more diverse public - not only musicologists, but also experts from other disciplines who now approach archival materials with new questions and tools. The most significant result has been the creation of entirely new audiences. First, a digital public, able to access the Foundation's heritage at any time and from anywhere; and second, a younger audience, reached through the Minor in Artistic Management, which introduced new perspectives and ideas into the Foundation's ecosystem. These developments have contributed to increasing visibility, improve reputation, and revitalize the Foundation's public image.

Therefore, in response to the question of whether the digitalization of cultural heritage can contribute to the de-elitization of culture, the answer appears to be positive. Digitalization has indeed lowered some of the traditional barriers to access - geographical, institutional, and disciplinary - thereby enabling a more inclusive model of cultural participation. The digitized collections and hybrid programming have begun to foster encounters between diverse publics and a more inclusive model of cultural participation. The digitized collections and hybrid programming have begun to foster encounters between diverse publics and cultural assets once reserved for a restricted circle of specialists.

However, digital engagement alone is not sufficient to lasting transformation. One of the major limitations that emerged from the study concerns the fragmented and often short-term nature of digital initiatives currently in place. The workshops, projects, and events described in the previous section, while valuable and impactful, lack a broader strategic continuity. There is no guarantee that the new audiences reached through these efforts will remain engaged with the Foundation in the long term. This reflects a broader risk associated with many digital cultural projects: the superficiality of digital interactions, which may spark initial interest but fail to cultivate deeper, lasting relationships.

Digitalization, in this sense, can be understood as a spark for institutional innovation - but not the flame itself. To sustain the momentum generated by digital projects, cultural institutions must develop a clear, integrated strategic vision that positions digitalization not merely as a technical solution or temporary enhancement, but as a core asset within a broader mission of accessibility, engagement, and sustainability. Without such vision, the innovations introduced by the LeviDigiLab risk dissipating once project funding ends, and the audience it attracts may revert to more mainstream cultural institutions with more consolidated outreach infrastructures.

The Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation now stands at a critical crossroads. The conditions for long-term success are in place: a valuable and unique cultural heritage, a renewed public interest, and promising collaborations. What remains is the institutional will to translate these elements into a sustainable, coherent strategy - one that embraces digitalization not as an isolated experiment, but

also as a transformative framework for the Foundation's future. Only through such a comprehensive approach can the potential for true de-elitization of culture - one that is participatory, accessible, and enduring - be fully realized.

Conclusions

The study aimed to explore the potential of digital tools as a catalyst for audience engagement within cultural institutions, contributing to the broader debate on methodologies for the democratization of culture. The use of digital technologies appears to align with this perspective, offering not only tools for the preservation of cultural heritage but also opportunities to reimagine it through innovative frameworks that involve new audiences in cultural practices. The Levi Foundation's digitalization laboratory is still in its second year of activity, and while this limits the scope of long-term evolution, the results already provide preliminary insight into the impact of digitalization on cultural institutions. These findings contribute to ongoing reflection on the benefits and challenges of digital practices, particularly in terms of their long-term sustainability and integration within broader institutional strategies.

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The use of digital technologies for cultural participation and education

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ABSTRACT

The Monument to the Independence of Brazil, also called the Monument of Ipiranga, named after the region of São Paulo that houses it, is a granite and bronze sculptural complex belonging to the city's Independence Park. In the same area is the Casa del Grido, a building of important historical importance, which makes up the material culture of the city and linked to the landmark of the Brazilian Proclamation of Independence that took place in 1822. Completing the architectural ensemble of the area is the Ipiranga Museum, completed in 1885 again with the aim of celebrating Brazilian independence. This contribution aims to enhance the historical identity both tangible and intangible of the three buildings by highlighting the need for awareness-raising activities at different levels. The results of the research carried out have also been disseminated thanks to the use of digital documentation intended as a key moment for the cultural revitalization of the site. In this way, historical memories can be promoted to prevent important pieces of a country's history from being forgotten or mistakenly revisited

Keywords:

Digital storytelling,
Cultural heritage,
Brazil,

Memory,
Awareness.

Introduction

The contribution presents the tangible and intangible history of the “Monument to the Independence of Brazil” (*Monumento à Independência do Brasil*), the “House of the Cry” (*Casa do Grito*) and the Ipiranga Museum (*Museu do Ipiranga*) all located in São Paulo, on the banks of the Ipiranga stream, in the place where history places the proclamation by Emperor Dom Pedro I of the independence of Brazil from the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarve on 7 September, 1822.

The aim of the essay is to outline an approach based on analytical and digital methods capable of highlighting historical errors and incorrect interpretations of artefacts through documentation. Digital documentation thus becomes the basis for a scientifically based storytelling enriched with accurate data that can be used for multiple purposes.

The Ipiranga Museum was designed in 1884 by Italian architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi. The museum was inaugurated for public access on September 7, 1895, six years subsequent to the Proclamation of the Republic. In 1909, Belgian landscape architect Arsenio Puttermans developed the gardens surrounding the main structure, which were subsequently reimaged by landscape architect Reinaldo Dierberger in the 1920s. In 1922, Afonso d'Escagnolle Taunay implemented a reorganisation of the collection to commemorate the Centenary of Brazil's Independence, focussing particularly on the history of the state of São Paulo. Artworks and sculptures pertaining to Brazil's history were positioned in the foyer, grand staircase, and Great Hall (Taunay, 1939). Inaugurated as part of the centenary celebrations of independence in 1922, the Brazilian Independence Monument was completed four years later. Made of granite, the complex is adorned with bronze sculptural groups representing emblematic historical events in the nation's history related to the independence process, to whose narration it evocatively contributes (Barro & Bacello, 1979). The construction of the House of Scream, it is presumed to date back to the mid-19th century. The oldest historical source referable to the monument dates back to 1844 (Carvalho, 1990). The buildings underwent changes over the years to their current consistency and appearance. For instance the house was destined for abandonment until 1955, when a study conducted by the Brazilian Geographical Society attributed historical value to the building. The study highlighted the material and immaterial characteristics of the site: for example, the use of *sopapo* (rammed earth), a vernacular construction technique (handmade using local materials) that consists of interweaving bundles of wood with horizontal supports, usually bamboo, using natural lianas, giving rise to a large perforated panel that becomes a wall when the openings are filled with clay. The process of investigation in the area began in 2018 through the 3D survey of the Ipiranga Museum (Balzani et al. 2023). The DIAPReM centre of the University of Ferrara first provided the future professionals in charge of the building's restoration with a reliable and morphometrically accurate 3D database. Subsequently, the Building Information Modeling tools were implemented taking into account the knowledge requirements for data

representation and visualisation during the project phase, as well as the subsequent requirements for knowledge and management over time by multidisciplinary teams (Parrinello et al. 2019).

Methodology

Published funds on the history of the Monument are scarce. The research initially focused on archival consultation, which was conducted through traditional methods described in an extensive literature (Moore et al., 2016, Timothy, 2012). Three types of sources were consulted:

- Written (books, letters and local historical newspaper);
- Oral (interviews and public discussions);
- Iconographic (paintings, paintings, sculptural objects available at the National Museum of Ipiranga)

The investigations were conducted in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Municipality of São Paulo (Núcleo de Monumentos e Obras Artísticas NMOA). The role of the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of the PSU was fundamental in order to identify additional unpublished sources traceable to the local network of researchers, which brought to light the absence of memory and awareness of the area's history and thus the need for a dedicated narrative.

For more than ten years, the DIAPReM laboratory at the University of Ferrara has been collaborating on training initiatives with the University of São Paulo. Since 2017, as part of this cooperation network, three major digital documentation projects have been carried out, involving the Ipiranga Museum, the Independence Monument and the Independence Park, which includes the Casa do Grito building (Fig. 1).



FIGURE 1. AERIAL VIEWS OF THE IPIRANGA SITE IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL (MAIN CONSTRUCTIONS BETWEEN 1895-1922).

Source: own elaboration of the author.

The end result is an integrated three-dimensional database with over 250 billion registered coordinates covering an area of 850 metres by 200 metres, one of the largest digital archives for cultural heritage in South America. This has provided an organised knowledge base available for the narration, also augmented, of the history of places through the Ipiranga Digital project. As part of the integrated three-dimensional survey campaign, the buildings, the urban context and the characteristics of the materials were then the subject of a visual survey and a photographic campaign to complete the digital documentation to enrich the understanding of the construction characteristics and the state of conservation of the materials and surfaces (Cacciotti et al. 2015). Integrated survey and 3D modelling methods and tools were implemented (Tommasi et al. 2019), taking into account the objectives of the survey, the accuracy required and the scale of the representation required by both the Municipality and the USP University (both of which own portions of the large area).

The places

With the growth of the city of São Paulo, driven above all by the success of coffee growing and the installation and expansion of the railway in the state, the Ipiranga neighbourhood became more prominent, given its strategic position between the port and the capital. It was allotted land in 1877 in

order to structure its occupation with the laying out of roads and future buildings. Discussions about building a monument in the neighbourhood continued until 1881, when the government finally resorted to lotteries to raise money for the project.



FIGURE 2. VIEW OF THE RECENTLY RESTORED IPIRANGA MUSEUM.

Source: picture of the author.

At that time, according to the historian Taunay, it was decided that the top of the Ipiranga hill “should be occupied by an architectural work of great splendour, to house an educational establishment” (Taunay, 1939). In the end, the project by the Italian architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi was chosen and work began in 1885, under the supervision of the also Italian master builder Luigi Pucci (Fig. 2).

The international call for tenders for the “Monument commemorating the Independence of Brazil” was published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* in September 1917, demonstrating a desire to amplify the scope of the centenary event (Monteiro, 2019). Ettore Ximenes and Manfredo Manfredi were declared winners of the competition in a very short time, but for technical reasons, the monument was inaugurated unfinished in 1922 and completed years later. The official handover took place on 7 September 1923 through a small note in the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper. 1926 is identified as the official year of the opening of the site to the public several years after the centenary celebrations (Salmoni & De Benedetti, 1981).

The monument is designed as a set of granite and bronze sculptures, representing three spheres of executive power: federal, state and municipal (Fig. 3).



FIGURE 3. VIEW OF THE MONUMENT TO THE INDIPENDENCE OF BRAZIL.

Source: picture of the author.

On the back, the “Independence or Death” panel depicts a group of men on horseback, and is inspired by the painting of the same name by Pedro Americo, who conceived the work in Florence in 1888 (Carvalho 1990). In 1952, a pyre with a symbolic fire is inaugurated in the Monument and work begins on the Imperial Crypt inside it. In 1954, the remains of Empress Leopoldina were placed. In 1972 the remains of Pedro I were placed and in 1982 the remains of Amelia of Leuchtenberg. In 2000, the Department of Historical Goods (DPH) designed an access route inside the monument (inaugurated in 2001), where the crypt known as the Imperial Chapel is located, thus ending the process of hybridisation of the original monument, which, having become a cenotaph, ends its metamorphosis into the status of an imperial tomb (thus fuelling confusion about its original function).

The *Casa do grito* (House of the Cry) has a plan dimension of 11 metres by 9.75 metres, divided longitudinally into 3 bands, comprising 8 rooms. These include a guest room and a storeroom that could be used to accommodate guests (usually an expedition leader), as well as to store provisions. The bedroom of the owners of the house was only accessible through the pantry. This was the most private space in the house, according to the floor plan of the ancient residence. The pantry, on the other hand, was an annexe attached to the kitchen, where women's work was carried out, such as the act of spinning, and which gave access to the couple's bedroom (Monteiro, 2019, p. 114). This distribution is no longer legible. A door between the sleeping and living areas that facilitates the flow of visitors has changed the distribution space of the building. The building was expropriated in 1936,

remaining semi-abandoned until 1955, when a restoration was carried out that reconfigured the place (Fig. 4) in analogy with the house depicted in Pedro Américo's painting located in the Noble Hall of the Paulista Museum (Museu do Ipiranga).



FIGURE 4. VIEW OF THE HOUSE OF THE CRY.

Source: Image by Mike Peel, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The reconfiguration included the insertion of a false window in imitation of the painting *Independência ou Morte* (1888). On that occasion, the building was named *Casa do Grito*. Historical memory was thus falsified. Today, it is erroneously but widely believed that the house has existed since the period of independence and some believe it was a refuge for Dom Pedro I himself (Fig. 5).

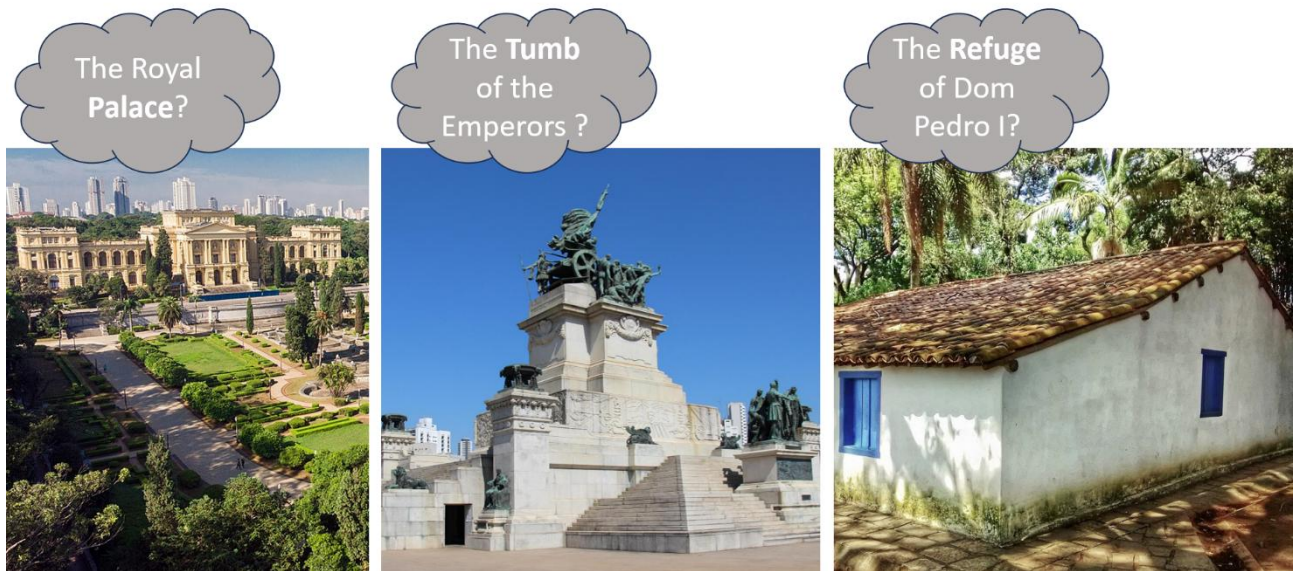


FIGURE 5. HISTORICAL MEMORY FALSIFIED BY LOSS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARENESS.

Source: own elaboration of the author.

Going digital in a proper way

The established integrated digital survey and documentation protocol prioritised the conservation and restoration objectives related to the stated cultural heritage. The significant scale, along with the intricate ornamental and sculptural elements, necessitates multi-scalar analyses, from urban scale to architectural detail, for conservation, communication, and enhancement objectives.

The integrated digital survey data must facilitate the shift to diverse scales of comprehension and representation (Wang & Zakaria, 2025). Consequently, a survey protocol was selected to facilitate the requisite geometric and angular precision while simultaneously optimising the quality of digital data in terms of redundancy. Consequently, an integrated topographical strategy was adopted over a morphological approach, which is currently preferred due to the enhanced applicability of terrestrial laser scanner technologies in big areas (Fig. 6).

The survey protocol mandates the establishment of a primary topographic network, secondary and tertiary target networks, normalisation and registration of the comprehensive point cloud model to ensure angular precision and elevation corrections, segmentation of the overall data model by usage-related areas, and visualisation of data and information within a digital portal. The current utilisation of digital platforms to integrate diverse non-digital and digital data sources is promoting additional experimentation in the dissemination and enhancement of both tangible and intangible cultural assets (Champion & Rahaman, 2020). Nonetheless, numerous obstacles persist. The objective of this initiative and associated activities has been recognised as enhancing and advocating for the usability of the entire point cloud model as a data source (Song et al., 2025). The established survey method

is employed to validate the precision of the digital data concerning the overall information system and its corresponding two and three-dimensional representations.

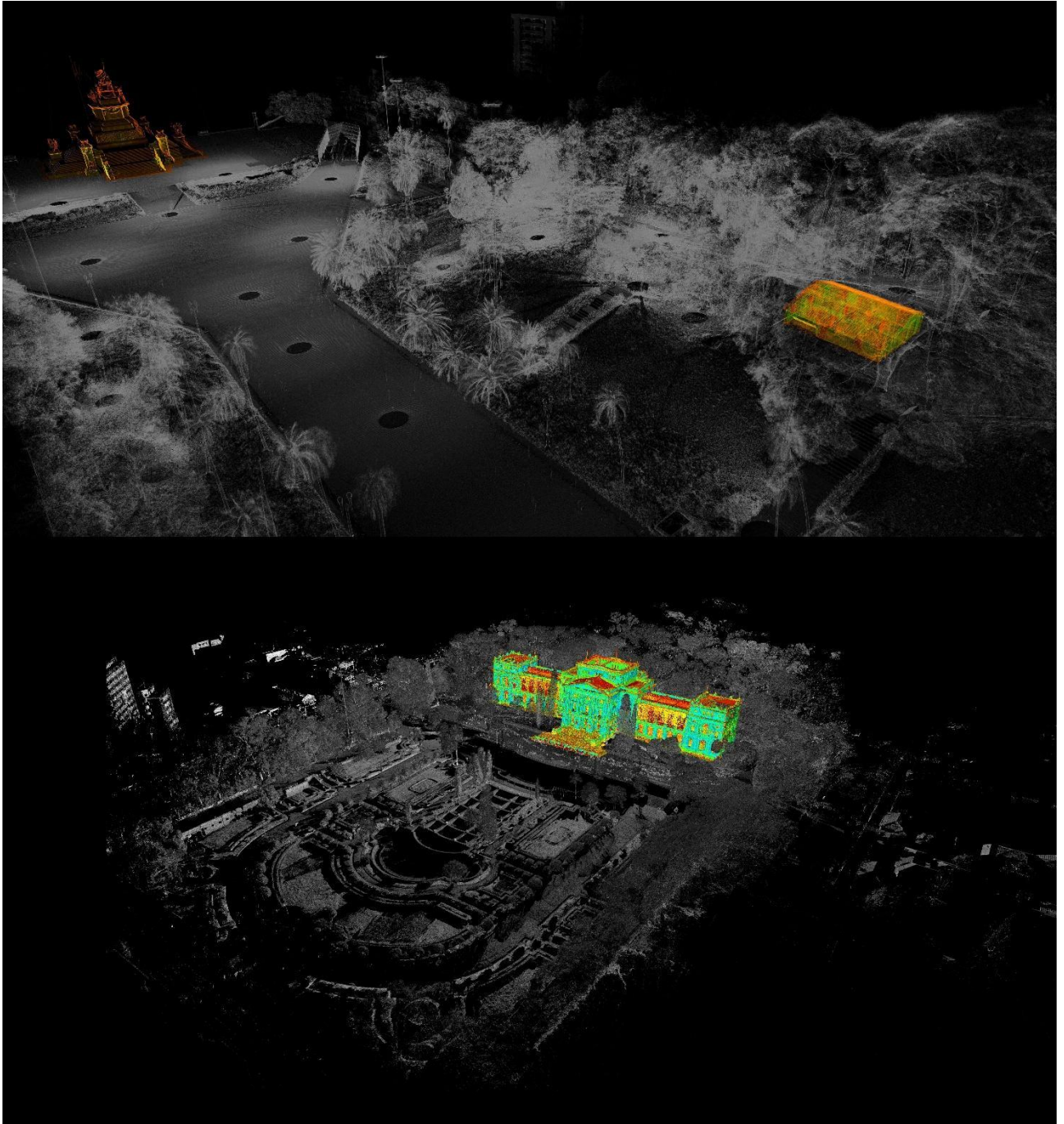


FIGURE 6. DIGITAL IMAGES OF THE 4 BUILDINGS SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION. IF WELL STRUCTURED THE HIGH DENSITY DATA BASE ALLOWS MULTIPLE ANALYSIS AND HIERARCHIZATION OF INFORMATION.

Source: own elaboration of the author.

The dimensions and calibre of identical information across the diverse visualisation platforms presently accessible, which can be incorporated into intricate information systems, do not yet facilitate the transmission of the value of the 3D data source to a broad audience, particularly in a dynamic fashion. This remains valid even if the overall cloud database's accessibility is assured in both native and open-source contexts, provided it is backed by appropriate computational infrastructures. Therefore, to maintain the multiscale information content, integration with static elements appears to be crucial.

Cultural Heritage storytelling: The Ipirangadigital web site

The field of digital storytelling has undoubtedly attracted a new branch in the research field on Cultural Heritage. Despite the fact that there were a few examples of interactive narration existing prior to the digital era (interactive books, role-playing games, etc.), the interaction is the most unusual element that the digital era has contributed into narrative structure (Goodson et al., 2010). Cultural heritage storytelling is explicitly designed to affect the real world (increasing the user's knowledge and making him/her somehow different) as opposed to traditional storytelling, which typically does not require the narrative world to have any impact on the real (user) world. Therefore, from a cognitive perspective, this type of narration is always interactive since it is designed to interact with the user's cultural dimension, which should alter as a result of any activity. The monument built to celebrate the Brazilian Independence from Portugal demands to be conserved but it is its intangible dimension that needs special care.

The peculiar situation of having the tomb of the emperor inside a monument that celebrates the end of the Portuguese reign over Brazil should be told taking into account the assumption that the story's events actually live between the narrative dimension and the reality dimension, inside the user's cognitive environment and culture (Miller, 2014).

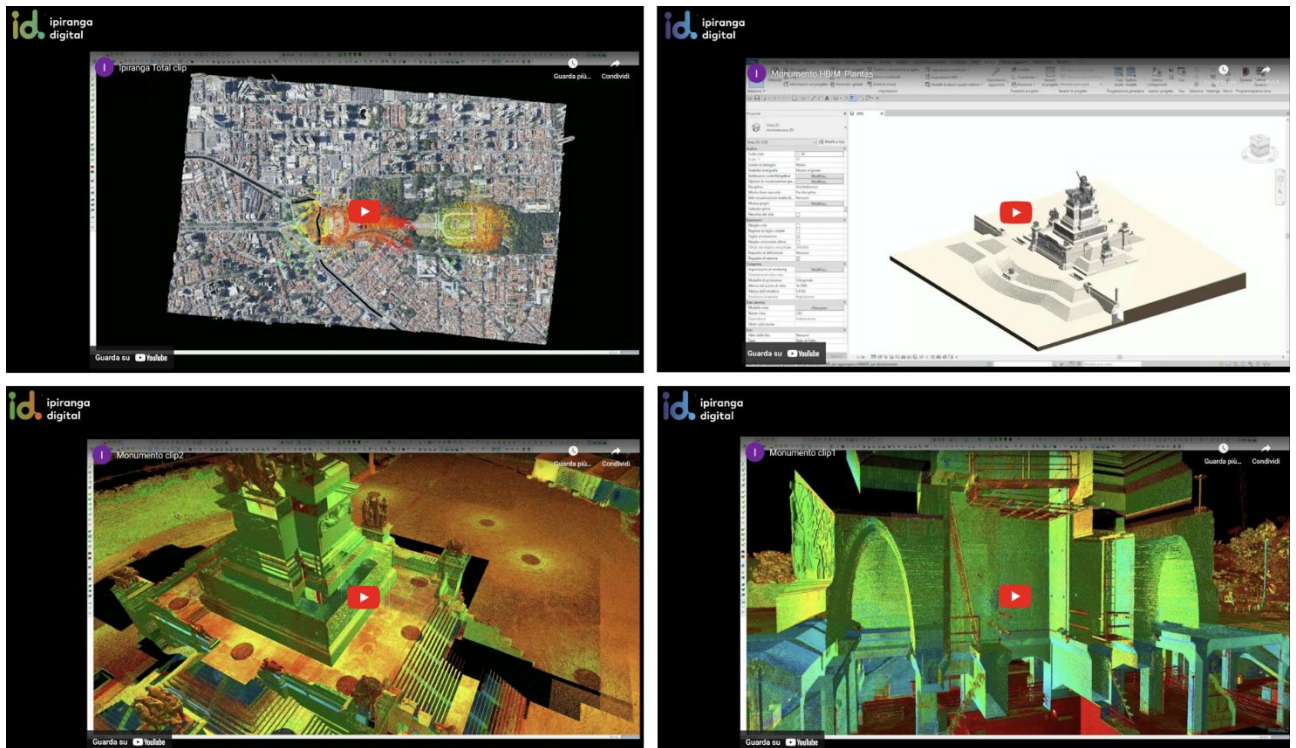


FIGURE 7. PAGES FROM THE WEB SITE IPIRANGADIGITAL.ORG.

Source: own elaboration of the author.

The attempt to share all the digital data through the web site “Ipirangadigital.org” aims at producing the awareness among the inhabitants related to some story elements that emerge beyond the story’s confines.



FIGURE 8. DIGITAL EDITING OF THE PAINTING “INDEPENDENCE OR DEATH” BY ARTIST PEDRO AMERICO (1888), A LARGE PAINTING MEASURING 7.6 X 4.1 METRES ON DISPLAY AT THE IPIRANGA MUSEUM IN SÃO PAULO. THE IMAGE PROVOCATIVELY RECALLS THE POWER OF DIGITAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRESERVATION OF THE MEMORY OF THE PAST.

Source: image of the painting in the public domain, graphic elaboration by the authors.

The website was created in Portuguese to reach the broadest audience and was launched in 2022 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Brazilian independence, is still expanding in terms of

graphics and information. It will eventually serve as a digital hub for knowledge and education (Fig. 7).

Final remarks

This study has shown how important digital tools are for recording, conserving, and reinterpreting cultural heritage, especially in intricate and symbolic locations like the Ipiranga Museum, the *Casa do Grito*, and the Monument to the Independence of Brazil. The study tackles not only the concrete elements of heritage conservation but also the complex and frequently disputed narratives that shape national memory through a multidisciplinary approach that combines archival research, architectural analysis, 3D digital modelling, and interactive storytelling. The ability of this work to expose how historical errors and mythologised interpretations can become entrenched in the public consciousness when heritage sites are not properly contextualised is one of its main contributions. The Casa do Grito case, for instance, demonstrates how restoration decisions and symbolic connections—like those derived from Pedro Américo's painting *Independência ou Morte*—can produce a warped interpretation of historical reality that is ultimately embraced as genuine by the general public. Digital technologies are uniquely positioned to offer the critical interventions required for such reinterpretations: instruments that enable multivocal, layered, and data-rich representations of historical knowledge.

The integration of high-resolution data, easily accessible digital platforms, and narrative interfaces can help close the gap between scholarly research and public involvement, as demonstrated by the Ipiranga Digital project. The project promotes a more reflective and participatory approach to cultural education by utilising the interactivity and scalability of digital storytelling. This approach encourages users to challenge conventional wisdom, consider different viewpoints, and develop stronger ties to their cultural heritage. By doing this, it creates new channels for inclusive, moral, and scientifically supported heritage communication that is also socially relevant.

The strategic value of point cloud databases and digital repositories in supporting long-term conservation, interdisciplinary cooperation, and well-informed decision-making is also highlighted by this study. In addition to aiding restoration efforts, the creation of an extensive and hierarchical data infrastructure makes it easier to conduct future studies, teach, and plan policies. But without ongoing investment in user-friendly interfaces and interpretive frameworks that convert technical accuracy into cultural meaning, these digital resources' full communicative potential remains constrained.

The Ipirangadigital.org project aims precisely at fostering awareness of the history of places that emerges beyond the confines of the narrative. Inaugurated in 2022 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Brazilian independence (presenting it in São Paulo at the Consulate General of Italy

in the presence of the authorities), Ipiranga Digital is available for further implementations and narrations to support an increasingly respectful knowledge of the real history of places and people through digital elaboration able to capture the audience attention (Fig. 8).

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