

Imagining the Next Generation of Museum Professionals: Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers

Materials for Discussion

Joint ICOFOM, ICTOP and COMCOL Symposium for the 27th ICOM General Conference, “The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities” and the ICOFOM 48th Annual Assembly



Imagining the Next Generation of Museum Professionals: Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers

International Committee for Museology
International Council of Museums

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We gratefully acknowledge the editorial assistance of Orphée Lamotte for the French papers.

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ISBN: 978-2-487970-15-1



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Introduction: Imagining the Next Generation of Museum Professionals: Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers

ICOFOM 48th Annual Symposium, November 12-15, 2025

And ICOM Joint ICOFOM, ICTOP and COMCOL Symposium for the 27th ICOM General Conference, Dubai 2025

For decades, ICOM committee members have been at the forefront of both the theoretical and practical sides of training museum professionals. With over 250 master's and doctoral-level programs offered globally, alongside alternative pathways like internships and apprenticeships, it begs the question: Are today's museum studies programs truly equipping professionals for the rapidly evolving needs of contemporary museums?

This meeting aims to dive deep into the pressing issues surrounding the training of tomorrow's museum scholars and professionals. What are the ethical and practical implications of the growing number of educational programs? Are we flooding the market with too many graduates for too few positions, or are there still vast gaps in training opportunities, particularly in underserved regions? And most critically, are these programs truly aligning with what the museum sector needs today? How do these trainings connect theories and practices in order to get critical points of view and think what museums are for? This meeting will spark a conversation that bridges the gap between education and real-world museum needs, bringing together voices from across the globe to explore solutions, share strategies, and ultimately, shape the future of museum training.

This Materials for Discussion collection unites, in an inclusive spirit, all contributions submitted for the symposium in the form of short articles to prepare for the ICOFOM Symposium. This publication has been made available before the symposium, in a very short time frame: In spite of the care given to the publication of this internal document for the ICOFOM membership, some mistakes may remain.

Musée et sacré : enjeux éthiques et politiques autour du patrimoine rituel

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Le rapport du musée au sacré reste un débat constant, tant la légitimité du musée sur le sujet est souvent contestée par des sociétés de provenance désireuses de maintenir les standards de conservation et de valorisation propres à leur culture. Les différentes polémiques suscitées çà et là par l'exposition d'objets sacrés ou de leur réappropriation dans le cadre d'une pratique artistique contemporaine deviennent légion. Il revient que la majorité de ces polémiques tournent autour des objets liés au secret d'initiation ou des restes humains. C'est notamment le cas des *Egungun*, culte des ancêtres propre aux groupes socio-culturels yoruba dont la collecte, la conservation et l'exposition posent problèmes du point de vue de certains dépositaires de cette tradition. Peut-on considérer que les *Egungun* relèvent d'une culture non muséale ? Leur collecte peut-elle encore être perçue comme un acte de soin ou relève-t-elle d'une extraction décontextualisée ? Plus largement, dans quelle mesure les musées peuvent-ils légitimement collecter/collectionner, conserver, exposer ou interpréter des objets sacrés issus de traditions vivantes, lorsque ces objets relèvent de systèmes symboliques complexes ?

Le culte Egungun, une tradition vivante, rituelle et communautaire

La croyance en la vie après la mort et la vénération des ancêtres défunts font partie intégrante des systèmes de croyance des groupes yoruba, comme de nombreux autres peuples en Afrique. Parmi les diverses formes de réincarnation connues en pays yoruba, le culte des *Egungun* constitue sans doute l'expression la plus spectaculaire de ce concept : « c'est à travers ce masque que l'âme d'un ancêtre décédé revient sur terre sous forme physique pour s'enquérir du bien-être de ses descendants. [...] À travers le *Egungun*, les Yorubas célèbrent le triomphe de l'esprit humain sur la mort¹ (Lawal, 1977. pp.57-58). »

Le terme *Egungun* peut être compris comme « ancêtre » et désigne à la fois les esprits des ancêtres et leur réincarnation sous forme physique. Il existe plusieurs typologies d'*Egungun*, accompagnées d'une grande diversité de représentations costumées. Les *Egungun* apparaissent généralement lors de festivals appelés *Odùn Egun* (ou *Odùn Egun-gun*) ou à l'occasion du décès d'un membre de la famille. L'apparition d'un *Egungun* dans une communauté s'accompagne d'un important cérémonial. Ces festivités peuvent durer plusieurs jours.

L'initiation au culte *Egungun* est réservée aux hommes, bien qu'une société *Egungun* comprenne aussi bien des hommes que des femmes, issus de lignées dépositaires de ce patrimoine rituel (Olaiya, 2022 ; Akande, 2019. pp.16-17). Lors des festivités, les *Egungun* sont maintenus à distance de la foule avec un bâton tenu par un initié. Cette précaution vise à protéger les vivants du contact avec le mort réincarné : toucher un *Egungun* constitue une infraction majeure aux règles du culte et expose l'individu à une condamnation spirituelle. C'est principalement pour ces raisons que la présence de ces figures ancestrales dans les musées ou leur représentation en dehors de tout cadre rituel, suscite de vives polémiques.

1 Traduit par nous.



Figure 1: Egungun (ancêtres revenants) à Porto-Novo. Photo © Manoel Lauriano, 2023.

Le musée à l'épreuve du sacré

En 2018, l'artiste plasticien béninois Dominique Zinkpè fut au centre d'une vive polémique sur les réseaux sociaux, après la diffusion d'une photographie le montrant déambulant dans les rues de Paris accompagné d'une figure évoquant un Egungun. Nombre d'internautes lui reprochèrent alors une profanation du culte et une désacralisation inacceptable. Pourtant, il ne s'agissait pas d'un véritable Egungun au sens rituel du terme, mais d'une création artistique contemporaine. Cette œuvre, qui était par ailleurs conçue par l'artiste Prince Toffa, s'inscrivait dans le cadre d'une performance réalisée à l'occasion de l'exposition *Hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, présentée à la Galerie Vallois (Dédjila, 2018, septembre 12 et octobre 9).

Le 16 mai 2021, une nouvelle polémique liée au culte Egungun a éclaté sur les réseaux sociaux. Elle concernait cette fois une publication du Musée Château Vodou de Strasbourg (Bossa, 2021). À l'occasion des préparatifs de la réouverture du musée, des photographies diffusées en ligne montraient le personnel du musée en train de manipuler des costumes d'Egungun, provoquant une vague d'indignation. Plusieurs éléments ont été pointés du doigt par les internautes, entre autres, le statut sacré de ces objets. Le fait de les exposer comme de simples objets, hors de tout cadrer rituel, a été perçu comme une forme de profanation et d'irrespect vis-à-vis des croyances qui leur sont associées. La manipulation des costumes par des femmes a suscité des critiques de la part de certaines personnes estimant que « les femmes n'ont pas à toucher ces masques » (Capecci, 2021).

Si l'on observe les cas précédents, on pourrait penser que les polémiques liées aux objets sacrés concernent exclusivement les institutions occidentales. Pourtant, en octobre 2022, une scène similaire s'est produite à Cotonou, au Bénin. La galerie Borna Soglo y présentait l'exposition *Goudouto*, mêlant les œuvres de Léonce Agbodjèlou, Cyprien Tokoudagba, et un costume d'Egungun. L'exposition de ce costume, figé hors de son contexte rituel, a été perçue comme une profanation, entraînant des menaces, des réactions virulentes sur les réseaux sociaux, et la tenue en urgence d'un rituel de purification par les dignitaires du culte (Bosquet, 2022).

Quels sont en réalité l'utilité et l'intérêt de présenter une telle culture dans des musées si les dépositaires de cette tradition, qui sont donc les premiers concernés, n'en veulent pas ?

Le sacré en contexte muséal : fracture ou reconfiguration ?

Si la question du sacré dans les musées est avant tout une question de point de vue, il faut cependant inscrire ce point de vue dans des contextes donnés. De fait, les objets souvent remis en question sont, pour la plupart, des biens nécessitant des degrés d'initiation et le respect des normes propres au culte auquel ils se rattachent. La problématique du sacré surgit dès l'acte de collecte, au moment où un objet est extrait de son contexte d'origine, généralement rituel, pour être déplacé vers un milieu muséal radicalement différent, détaché de ses références spirituelles, sociales et symboliques. Comme le rappelle Laurick Zerbini (2013, p. 168) :

Une fois entré au musée, l'objet subit un changement tant au niveau de son usage que de son statut, et d'une certaine manière, il gagne du sens par rapport à cette nouvelle recontextualisation, soit en fonction de sa mise en espace et mise en ordre, soit par sa confrontation avec d'autres pièces qui l'amène à s'exprimer.

Le changement de système de valeur, du cadre rituel vers le musée, contribue sans aucun doute à amener l'institution muséale à prendre en compte la dimension immatérielle de certains biens, qui dépasse largement le cadre matériel de l'objet. « Le passage de la clôture, du caché/secret réservé à l'initié, à la lumière des projecteurs de la galerie de musée se fait-il sans éroder le sens, sans violation de l'intime ? Comment la muséographie peut-elle prendre en compte le mystère ? » se demandait Madeleine Blondel (2013, p. 153-173).

Au début des années 2000, des polémiques similaires à celles que nous avons décrites plus haut avaient animé l'opinion scientifique autour de l'exposition *Secrets*, présentée et initiée par Marc Couturier au Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (MAAO). Les différentes interrogations soulevées à l'époque sur la capacité du musée à conserver et valoriser le sacré n'ont pas véritablement évolué en un quart de siècle.

Les deux systèmes de valeurs évoqués semblent finalement demeurer dans des champs cloisonnés : le sacré pour le culte, le patrimoine pour la culture. Les deux semblent, *a priori*, cantonnés à leur propre système d'intelligibilité qui ne peuvent véritablement fusionner. Cela tient très probablement aux deux institutions qui s'opposent : l'institution culturelle, d'une part, ancrée dans la laïcité ; l'institution religieuse, d'autre part, inscrite dans des fondements dogmatiques et spirituels (Tubœuf, 2016, p. 17).

Le musée semble être condamné à résoudre un dilemme : restituer² les objets aux communautés d'origine ou s'adapter à leur nature (Derlon & Judy-Ballini, 2001, p. 204).

Certaines expériences récentes suggèrent néanmoins qu'un changement de paradigme est à l'œuvre dans les musées. Ce changement de paradigme progressif tend parfois à transformer ces institutions laïques en sanctuaires rituels, souvent à l'occasion d'une exposition ou d'un projet collaboratif avec les communautés d'origine. Lors de la Semaine franco-béninoise organisée au Muséum de Toulouse, des experts, dont des dignitaires traditionnels béninois, ont été conviés à travailler sur la collection béninoise du musée. L'ouverture des travaux s'est faite par une cérémonie de libation autour des objets, réaffirmant symboliquement leur dimension sacrée et leur ancrage rituel, malgré leur présence en contexte muséal.

Néanmoins cette volonté manifeste du musée d'entrer en dialogue avec le sacré ne résout pas pour autant les problématiques liées à la présence de certains objets, puisqu'elle ne transforme pas la nature du musée lui-même. Il semble difficile, voire presque impossible, pour une institution muséale d'intégrer pleinement les notions de secret et d'initiation. Certaines traditions exigent que seuls des initiés manipulent les biens. Cela suppose, pour les musées, une réorganisation profonde de leurs réserves, en

2 Comme on peut le constater avec les objets restitués au Bénin, la problématique du sacré ne s'arrête pas nécessairement dès que l'objet est rendu à son pays d'origine.

fonction des spécificités culturelles mais aussi, une cogestion de l'objet avec la communauté d'origine. Puisque — comme le disent Derlon et Jeudy-Ballini (2001, pp. 205-206) — le retrait simple de l'objet des expositions ferait sombrer le musée dans une forme d'hypocrisie du paraître.

Vers une autre muséologie ?

La présentation de Marion Bertin (citée par Mairesse, 2019) sur l'organisation des réserves et des expositions au Vanuatu (répartition des objets selon les interdits, adaptation du personnel en fonction des savoirs, encadrement des expositions permanentes ou temporaires) témoigne cependant des possibilités d'une autre muséologie, fondée sur le respect des règles spirituelles.

Toutefois, malgré les efforts et les mutations engagés par les institutions muséales, il demeure difficile pour le musée de restituer pleinement la dimension immatérielle du sacré. C'est pour cette raison que, dans les contextes où des institutions traditionnelles de conservation et de valorisation du sacré sont déjà actives, nous pensons qu'il est préférable que les musées délèguent ou renoncent à la conservation de ces objets sensibles, afin de respecter la sacralité de l'objet et des communautés concernées.

Les musées européens qui détiennent des objets extra-européens semblent être condamnés au dilemme et/ou à des solutions approximatives. En revanche, dans certains pays, notamment africains, il est encore possible de penser une muséologie véritablement alternative, plus à l'écoute des réalités culturelles locales. C'est pourquoi, bien qu'il existe déjà des principes déontologiques énoncés par l'ICOM, il paraît important d'accompagner activement la réflexion muséologique dans les contextes où des marges d'innovation existent encore, notamment en Afrique.

En guise de conclusion...

Il ne s'agit pas de dire qu'il n'existe aucun dialogue possible entre le musée et les objets sacrés ou sensibles mais plutôt d'ouvrir la voie à des formes de médiation respectueuses des cadres symboliques originels. L'expérience de *Ouidah à travers ses fêtes et patrimoines familiaux* (6-10 février 1995), avait déjà démontré qu'il existe une voie plus proche des préoccupations africaines. Cette exposition attira près de 3 855 visiteurs le premier mois, suscitant un vif engouement, notamment à Ouidah et à Cotonou (Adandé, 1997 cité par Biaya, 1999, p. 761).

Son succès tenait au fait d'avoir articulé exposition muséale et manifestations populaires, notamment les danses *Gèlèdè* et *Buriyan*. Dans le cas des *Egungun*, il s'agirait pour le musée d'adopter une logique similaire, en s'adaptant au calendrier aux logiques rituelles des communautés détentrices, plutôt que d'imposer sa propre logique et sa temporalité. Cela suppose pour le musée de renoncer à sa prétention à l'universalité et de reconnaître qu'il n'est pas aux normes pour la conservation de certaines cultures. Nous reprenons ici volontairement un argument souvent avancé par certains États ou institutions occidentales pour refuser la restitution des objets aux pays africains, au motif que ces derniers ne disposeraient pas d'institutions muséales aux normes adéquates. Or, dans le cas étudié, nous pouvons aisément à notre tour affirmer que les musées occidentaux ne sont pas aux normes.

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Curating in France: Between institutional rigidity and the need for critical practice

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Curatorial training is a relatively recent field within the broader history of art and museum education. While international models have developed programs grounded in artistic proximity, critical discourse, and professional flexibility, the French context presents a more fragmented and institutionally rigid landscape. Historically, museum professionals in France were trained on the job until the founding of the École du Louvre in 1882, which marked a turning point in the formalization of conservation studies, but not of curatorial practice. Over the 20th century, curators were increasingly recruited through state-driven mechanisms, reinforcing a system where heritage management and conservation expertise were prioritized over critical or experimental approaches to exhibition-making.

This text examines the specificity of the French case through the history of its main institutional actors – the École du Louvre and the École du Magasin – while contrasting them with the more embedded and practice-driven curatorial programs that emerged abroad. Despite a rich public infrastructure for contemporary art, curating in France has long remained a misunderstood or undervalued profession, frequently conflated with cultural management or museum conservation. In tracing these tensions, this essay argues for the recognition of curatorial work not only as a profession but as a necessary space for artistic and intellectual engagement within the cultural ecosystem.

One should remember that, for a long time, there were no formal training structures for museum professionals in France – curators generally learned their craft on the job. This situation began to change with the foundation of the École du Louvre in 1882. The school emerged in a post-war context of national reconstruction following the Franco-Prussian War, as part of a broader effort to intellectually rearm the defeated French nation. Initially torn between becoming a school for museum administration and a “practical school of archaeology,” it ultimately embraced the latter model. Rooted in hands-on learning, it emphasized direct engagement with artworks and collaboration with museum professionals (Durey, 2021). After World War II, the recruitment of museum curators followed a tripartite evolution: first, from 1945 onward, through eligibility lists managed by a national commission, distinguishing between state and local museum posts based on training at the École du Louvre. Only future state curators were selected via competitive exams at the baccalaureate level, and they followed a longer course of study, including a thesis, whereas local curators typically completed only a year of museology training (October, 1999).

From 1963, under reforms to the French civil service, state curators were recruited through open competitions requiring both a university degree and the École du Louvre diploma, while local curators continued to be appointed via aptitude lists. In 1986, a final shift unified the training for both state and territorial curators at the École du Patrimoine (which became the École nationale du patrimoine in 1990), reinforcing the professionalization of the field. Nonetheless, the École du Louvre has long struggled to keep pace with the changing landscape of exhibition practices. It failed for decades to address contemporary art in its curriculum – a gap that became increasingly problematic as new types of exhibition spaces emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, demanding curatorial skills beyond traditional

conservation. This blind spot partly explains why some curators at the MNAM (Centre Pompidou) were recruited via alternative pathways and why independent curatorial training programs, such as the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program (founded in 1968 in New York), became pioneering models on the international stage (Glicenstein, 2015).

However, France did not remain silent for long after the establishment of the Whitney program and it was, in fact, one of the first countries to develop a dedicated school for curatorial studies attached to an art center – the École du Magasin in Grenoble. Founded in 1987, just a few months after the opening of the Magasin-Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, it became the first European program specifically designed to train curators through a professional framework that combined research and experimentation, collaboration, exhibition-making, and mediation. As a practice-oriented curriculum, the program included studio visits, seminars, and the conception of a collective public project carried out within the art center itself. While the Magasin-CNAC team provided structural and logistical support, participants retained a high degree of autonomy in shaping their research and selecting their interlocutors. Over the years, numerous prominent figures from the contemporary art world served as mentors or guest lecturers, guiding the projects and fostering critical engagement. The school ceased its activities in 2016 after more than 25 years of operation following a restructuring of the Magasin-CNAC. In its time of operation, it trained over 150 participants and hosted more than a thousand contributors from intellectual, artistic, and institutional backgrounds, playing a key role in the professionalization of curatorial practice in France and across Europe (Moulène, 2015).

Although the École du Magasin ultimately closed due to administrative issues within the art center to which it was attached, several underlying challenges had marked its 25 years of activity. The school always had to contend with a fundamental tension: curating in France, even in 2016, was not formally recognized as a profession (Moulène, 2015). As the Ministry of Culture in France stated in 2013, the school was training students in practices that were still emerging, without offering them student status or institutional recognition. Foreign participants had to secure their own funding and insurance, and the lack of a diploma created barriers to further integration. Efforts were made to address this gap through collaborations with the École supérieure d'art et design Grenoble-Valence, which resulted in joint seminars and exhibitions and plans to formalize the program through a shared degree. However, as the crisis at the Magasin deepened, this fragile structure unraveled. The closure of the school – and the instability of the institution as a whole – represents not just a local issue, but a broader threat to one of the historical pillars of France's contemporary art scene, with potentially lasting consequences for curatorial training.

A 2009 survey (Jeanpierre & Sofio, 2015) of professionals in the field revealed that among 100 respondents who reported having completed specialized training, 11 had attended the École du Magasin in Grenoble, nine had completed the museology cycle at the École du Louvre, and 17 held a professional master's degree in cultural event management from institutions in Paris (Paris I, IV, or X) or regional universities such as Nice, Bordeaux, Dijon, or Lille. Fourteen had studied in the *Métiers et arts de l'exposition* program at the University of Rennes 2. These figures point to a relatively fragmented landscape of curatorial education in France, which merits brief examination. The master's program in contemporary art and its exhibition at Paris IV touches on curatorial practice but remains primarily focused on production, with limited theoretical engagement and little direct connection to artists. Sciences Po offers a program in cultural institution management, oriented toward management and administration but often disconnected from the practical needs of emerging curators. Programs such as *Métiers et arts de l'exposition* (Exhibition arts and crafts) at the University of Rennes and *Écritures critiques et curatoriales* (Critical and curatorial writing) at the University of Strasbourg open paths toward criticism, mediation, or research yet remain constrained by the structural limitations of traditional university frameworks.

Abroad, curatorial training programs are often closely tied to major contemporary art institutions, creating strong links between academic learning and professional practice. For example, the program at Goldsmiths in London collaborates with Tate Modern, the California College of the Arts with the Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, while De Appel in Amsterdam partners with the Stedelijk Museum and operates directly within a proper exhibition space. Some programs even have their own exhibition venues, such as CCS Bard in New York and the Royal College of Art in London (Glicenstein, 2016). A notable feature of many of these programs is their integration within art schools, a model more widespread internationally than in France. Examples include the two-year master's programs at Goldsmiths (UK), HEAD in Geneva (Switzerland), Städelschule in Frankfurt (Germany), and Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan (Italy), as well as shorter programs like the one-year certificate at Hunter College in New York or De Appel in Amsterdam, and the post-diploma programs at KASK in Ghent (Belgium) and the École Supérieure des Arts Appliqués in Vienna (Austria).

These international examples reflect a more practice-oriented approach to curatorial training, often fostering meaningful proximity between curators-in-training and artists-in-training. This closeness not only encourages future professional collaboration, but also helps prevent the instrumentalization of artists as mere providers of content for curatorial projects, instead positioning them as equal partners in the creative process. In France, there has been only one notable exception to the absence of curatorial programs within art schools: the “Artistes & Métiers de l'exposition” track at the Beaux-Arts de Paris. Launched in 2019 under the leadership of Jean de Loisy, this ambitious initiative brought together around 20 students with five guest curators-in-residence to co-develop large-scale exhibitions combining works by students, faculty, and the school's own collection. Despite its innovative pedagogical aims, the program quickly faced difficulties, with the scale and logistical demands of the exhibitions overwhelming both the students and the staff. Designed as a hands-on learning experience, the program lacked a solid theoretical and critical foundation, resulting in limited opportunities for sustained dialogue. Since the appointment of a new director of the program in 2022, it has been restructured around a single annual exhibition, curated by her, in which students now play a more observational than participatory role. Weekly sessions remain loosely organized and are primarily focused on production rather than theoretical reflection on curatorial practice.

Since the 1980s France has developed one of the richest and most decentralized ecosystems for contemporary art in Europe, supported by a wide network of FRACs, regional art centers, and major state museums. Yet curatorial practice as a distinct and critical profession remains insufficiently acknowledged within this landscape. The legacy of a modern, technocratic vision of labor division – separating the tasks of conservation (handled by state-trained curators) and management (assigned to cultural administrators) – has left little room for the emergence of the curator as a thinker, mediator, or critic. Most institutions continue to operate under the assumption that exhibitions can be managed without the active presence of curators trained to develop complex narratives, forge meaningful collaborations with artists, or engage in public dialogue.

This institutional configuration contrasts sharply with international models where curatorial studies are embedded within art schools or closely linked to major museums, enabling curators to work alongside artists from the outset. In France, despite sporadic initiatives, such as the now-defunct École du Magasin or the limited Beaux-Arts de Paris program, there is still no sustainable structure to support curatorial education that combines theory, practice, and intellectual autonomy. Recognizing curating as more than a functional task is essential for the vitality of artistic production and its reception in the public sphere.

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Zagreb Museological School: legacy, transformation, future visions

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The year 1984 was yet another a leap year, probably most associated with a dystopian novel by the English writer George Orwell¹ dealing with the possible challenges and consequences of totalitarianism, mass surveillance and repressive regimentation of people and behaviours within society, which are much more relevant today compared to originally projected 1984. Besides the novel, the year 1984 witnessed some significant historic events, e.g. Steve Jobs launched the Macintosh personal computer in the USA, the 1984 Winter Olympics were held in Sarajevo (Yugoslavia²), the United States and the Vatican (Holy See) restored full diplomatic relations, the Soviet Union announced a boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles (USA), the Canadian entertainment company Cirque du Soleil was founded, the famine in Ethiopia started, the assassination of Indira Gandhi (the Prime Minister of India) happened with riots following, the charity single “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” was recorded in London to raise money to combat the famine in Ethiopia, and Bishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu (South Africa) received the Nobel prize for peace for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist. While the list could go on and on, what is important for us is not an event on the world scale but the fact that 1984 is when the Zagreb museological school became fully official by establishing the Chair (Sub-Department) of Museology within the Department of Information Sciences³ at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb⁴ (Croatia). Furthermore, only two years later the University of Zagreb started the innovative and subject-specific academic study programme⁵ in museology within the aforementioned department.

The relation in between Croatia, or more precisely Zagreb, and museology / museum studies didn’t start in 1984. Already in 1955 Anton Bauer⁶ had established the Museum Documentation Center in Zagreb, a public institution with the mission to systematically collect, record and catalogue any/all materials related to museum development and activities within ex-Yugoslavia. Even a few years earlier, he started cooperation with the University of Zagreb to deliver lectures about the importance of museum work, at that time foremost in connection with the Art History Department. In 1966, Bauer initiated the Postgraduate Programme in Museology as part of the Postgraduate Programme in Librarianship

1 Originally published in 1949.

2 Today ex-Yugoslavia due to split of the country in 1991. The Republic of Croatia (with Zagreb as the capital) declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 25th June 1991, following the Croatian referendum on independence (held in May 1991), with 93% of voters supporting independence.

3 From 2011 the Department of Information and Communication Sciences.

4 The biggest public university in South-East Europe, originally founded in 1669.

5 It would be called the master programme today, taking into accounts the European system of three years bachelor- plus two years master-level study; but it was at that time a four-year study programme with specialization within the last two years, where museology was one of the possible specialisations.

6 Antun Bauer (1911-2000) was a Croatian collector and museologist. He founded many museums and started the first museological journals in Croatia, *Muzeologija* (Museology) and *Informatica Museologica*, both still in print.

and Documentation Science. For Bauer, the main reason for developing museology (as a science) was not the museum institution *per se*, nor its functions, but its collections and museum objects; in other words, the museum object as the focus of knowledge as a documentation of the past, thus pushing museology toward documentation and retrieval sciences and librarianship (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). It might be interesting to mention that the initial proposals for the 1966 courses for the university post-graduate programme didn't include museology only but also topics related to protection of natural heritage sites⁷. This focus set the scene for how museology became a recognised scientific field in Croatia and why it was/is so strongly connected to information sciences.

The program reached a new stage of development after the Chair (Sub-Department) of Museology within the Department of Information Sciences was established (1984). The main leader was the late Ivo Maroević⁸ who, in his seminal book *Uvod u muzeologiju* (1993), later translated (and partly adapted) into English⁹, defined museology as:

that area of information sciences concerned with research into the identification, preservation and communication of the museality of the material manifestations of culture and nature (in the first place musealia) in order to preserve human heritage and to interpret and transmit its significance, and concerned with forms of organized and institutionalized activity (especially museums) serving these goals. (Babić & Vujić, 2012; Maroević, 1998)

In other words, the Zagreb Museological School was fully anchored into information (and later communication) sciences. We fully support the addition of communication sciences since many important 21st century museological topics/dilemmas have their place in the field.

If we (consciously) narrow the historical approach¹⁰, we could say the Zagreb Museological School has been closely connected to thoughts initially developed by a Czech museologist Zbyněk Stránský (1926 - 2016) but pushed more toward an idea that museology/museum studies (as a scientific discipline) could find its place foremost within information sciences, since it might exist only by the information embedded in museum objects, which museum curators are researching. Accordingly, it creates and promotes the idea that museality, as defined by Maroević, is the core of museology/museum studies, and to be recognised as a scientific discipline, a concept which Maroević presented at several ICTOP and ICOFOM annual conferences. It is not irrelevant to mention here that some internationally important persons who contributed to the development of museology in the late 20th century (and further on) were strongly connected to the Zagreb Museological School – like Peter van Mensch, who defended his PhD thesis¹¹ at the University of Zagreb under Maroević's supervision.

In the mid-1990's (when Croatia already became an independent state) T. Šola turned the Zagreb Museological School toward the French ideas connected to community engagement¹² but also toward an idea of proposing a mega-profession, the one which would embrace all work done in museums, galleries, archives and libraries (GLAM¹³). It would be unfair not to mention a significant contribution done by Žarka Vujić to the main ideas established within the Zagreb museological school, foremost

7 This is an important interconnection of cultural and natural heritage, not always present.

8 Prof. Ivo Maroević (1937-2007) was an art historian very close to conservation by way of his education and early work. He was a distinguished ICOM member, mainly connected to ICTOP and ICOFOM, where he presented his ideas about better education of museum workers on multiple occasions, as well as underscoring the role of museology within information sciences or (today, as in Croatia) information and communication sciences.

9 *Introduction to museology: the European approach*, München: Verlag Dr. Christian Mueller-Straten, 1998.

10 Due to the set limits about the size of articles in the Issue.

11 PhD thesis entitled "Towards a Methodology of Museology" (defended in 1993).

12 By insisting on eco-museum ideas/concepts.

13 Or in Croatia, AKM = arhivi, knjižnice, muzeji, or in English archives, libraries and museums

by conducting numerous researches directly applied to the homeland country/Croatian museums, including the seminal book *Izvori muzeja u Hrvatskoj* (The Development of Museums in Croatia, 2007) and by opening topics related to visitor's experience, museum management and museum architecture.

In 2006, pushed by the so-called Bologna reform¹⁴, the Zagreb Museological School made a significant shift toward new topics. The ex-master's programme that had been focused only on museology as a specialization became the Master in Museology and Heritage Management, which almost tripled the interest of students to attend it. Part of the reasons why we changed (and extended) the master's in 2006 were related to much more demand detected within the tourism sector¹⁵ (heritage and cultural tourism) as well as initial establishment of private consultancy companies working in the field of heritage¹⁶. During the second decade of the 21st century, the Zagreb Museological School furthermore embraced the importance of diverse community engagement¹⁷, which include topics such as heritage literacy as a kind of universal human/heritage right (Babić et al., 2019), the idea of multifaced heritage communities (Council of Europe, 2005) and a gendered museology. In addition, even though it is a more practical consideration than a theoretical development, we in Zagreb have several times opened discussions as to whether we want to make our Master in Museology and Heritage Management fully international by delivering courses in English only¹⁸ or whether it will remain as it is today.

Will the future of museology/museum studies and related teaching about it¹⁹ be global or mostly regional? What are the pros and cons in the first and second case scenarios? The case study of Croatia (Zagreb Museological Schools) could offer some ideas/dilemmas but cannot offer the ultimate answer. Still, it could contribute toward an understanding of the possible future(s).

The Republic of Croatia is today part of the European Union; however some of its valuable museum/heritage objects are found in other European countries²⁰ due to historical circumstances. Thus, Croatia, at least, could be a case study for sharing experiences of colonised heritage while still in Europe – but not the same Europe – as perceptions which are common from the colonised countries. And because of that and many other reasons, the Croatian middle way could be an idea for how we all could project teaching museology in the following decades. Not as the only option, but one among many.

14 The Bologna Reform or the Bologna Process counts for a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries (foremost the European Union countries) to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications.

15 Today tourism creates almost 20% of Croatian GDP (Gross Domestic Product). While it was slightly less in 2006 (around 18%), it was somehow at that time that more serious and intense public debates started about a year-around tourism which asks for, among other things, well developed and numerous cultural products (as opposed to the strong “sea and sun” tourism model concentrated along the Adriatic coast, a summer-only enterprise).

16 These private companies are doing diverse types of heritage-related work, from strategic planning over heritage interpretation or museological plans to small or bigger scale heritage management tasks, so the profile of workers they need must overarch (as much as possible) all heritage-related knowledge.

17 It is valid to say here the importance of communities was incorporated long before 2006 in many texts coming from members of the Zagreb Museological School (as well as in the study programme) but it was not so strongly emphasised as it was in the past 15 years.

18 This is always a dilemma for scientists/lecturers in the small countries, since we are concerned about protecting the use of the national language vs. the internationalisation of the study programme.

19 Foremost by the university-related programmes, but also by numerous training programmes and similar activities of life-long learning programmes.

20 As in Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary), or Saint Petersburg (Russian Federation).

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Caring for human/ancestral remains preserved in museum collections: An overview from Belgium regarding human/ancestral remains originating from Congo

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Many museums in Europe and other parts of the world hold human remains in their collections. Human remains originating from outside European borders are closely associated with racist scientific theories as well as the history of colonisation and imperialism. Over the past few decades, museums and universities have been working with these sensitive collections to gain a better understanding of their history and provenance and to develop more appropriate care practices.

This communication uses Belgian collections as a case study to provide an overview of care practices for human and ancestral remains originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly the Free State of the Congo under the personal rule of Leopold II from 1885 to 1908 and a Belgian colonial territory until 1960. This communication is linked to the REMAIN HUMAN project, which is funded by the Belgian government and received a WelCHANGE grant from the French-speaking Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research. The project began in 2024 and will run for three years. The project examines practices and negotiations relating to ancestral and human remains from the Congo held in Belgian collections. To this end, a multidisciplinary team has been assembled, comprising a political scientist (Valérie Rosoux from the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve), a cultural psychologist (Laurent Licata from the Brussels Free University) and a museologist and anthropologist (Marion Bertin, a postdoctoral researcher on the project at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve). Drawing on these four disciplines, the team conducts museum fieldwork research and interviews with museum professionals and members of Congolese communities in Congo and the Congolese diaspora in Belgium. The project also considers valuable results from previous research projects, particularly the Human Remains Origin(s) Multidisciplinary Evaluation (HOME) project, which took place between 2019 and 2022.

Human/ancestral remains in Belgian collections

The HOME inventory provides an overview of human remains preserved in Belgian collections.¹ A total of 383 human remains displaced during colonial times from the Democratic Republic of Congo were identified in the collections of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS), the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Africa Museum), the Brussels Free University and the Royal Belgian

¹ The HOME Project did not focus on human remains originating from colonial contexts. The inventory conducted, although not exhaustive, shows that most of the human remains held in museum collections originate from archaeological contexts within the Belgian borders.

Society for Anthropology and Prehistory (HOME, 2022). However, the team had contacted other universities and museums that have not responded to their inquiries and survey. Most of the inventoried human remains are skulls, but there are also partial skeletons. At the time they entered collections, these human remains lost their identity and became dehumanised scientific specimens. A few of them can, however, still be identified as they entered the collections as war trophies. This is the case for Chief Lusinga from the Tabwa communities, whose skull is now held in the RBINS collections after having been part of the Royal Museum of Congo's collections. The Tabwa communities have specifically requested the repatriation of this skull in order to give the deceased chief proper funerals (Couttenier, 2024).

The definitions applied and the taxonomies used in museum contexts must be questioned as they focus mainly on bones. As numerous human remains in Belgian collections are skulls, other parts of human bodies are excluded, such as hair and teeth. Casts must also be reconsidered as they bear traces of human bodies. Artefacts containing human remains – which is a common practice in some Congolese cultures – were identified as a separate category in the HOME survey. As far as I am aware, no Belgian museums display skulls or bones of colonial origin today. However, artefacts including human body parts are still on display in museums such as the Royal Museum of Congo.

Another remark could be added regarding the often-used words “human” and “ancestral”, preceding “remains”. While usually used as synonyms without further explanation, I believe that they will require further thinking and research in the future on what they truly mean and how they should be used.

Care practices between law and ethics

On 2022, June 30, the Belgian federal parliament adopted a law which acknowledges the alienability of cultural artefacts related to the Belgian state's colonial past and establishes a legal framework for their return and repatriation. However, this law excludes human remains, archives and items from the period when the Free State of Congo was under the personal rule of Leopold II as well as items from Rwanda and Burundi, which were administered by Belgium after the First World War. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a National Commission for the Repatriation of Cultural Assets, Archives and Human Remains was established to coordinate repatriations from Belgium to the Congo State and to communities. To this date, the Congolese State has never officially claimed for the repatriation of any human remain. Until now, the Tabwa communities' claims to retrieve Lusinga's skull have not been supported at national official levels. Only Patrice Lumumba's tooth has been repatriated to Kinshasa from Gérard Soete, a Belgian policeman who took part in the assassination of the first Congolese prime minister in November 1960 and kept the tooth. Fourteen skulls were also supposed to be transferred from the Free University of Brussels to the National University of Lubumbashi; their property was already transferred but the skulls still remain in Brussels.

After the end of the HOME project, two bills were discussed: the first aimed at prohibiting the sale of human remains and was discussed following several mediatic cases involving colonial skulls auctioned in Belgium; and the second concerned human remains in collections of Belgian federal scientific institutions, aiming to enable their repatriation for funeral purposes. However, neither of these projects was ever voted on by Parliament. In January 2023, the Belgian bio-ethical consultative committee published a statement, following a consultation by several federal institutions (the Africa Museum, the Royal Museum for Art and History and the Belgian Royal Institute for Natural Sciences), regarding human remains in museums, scientific institutions and private collections. This statement concludes that these collections lack a specific status in the Belgian Civil Code.

Therefore, today, professional recommendations and codes of ethics are the main tools that currently help framing practices of care when dealing with human remains. These texts focus on four aspects: their display; their modes of acquisition and provenance; scientific research; and the potential repatriation of colonial collections. In 2023, the recommendations resulting from the HOME project referred

to two ICOM codes of ethics: the general ICOM code of ethics, the current version of which dates from 2004 and includes a section dedicated to “culturally sensitive material”;² and the ICOM code of ethics for natural history museums, published in 2013. The latter provides a full section dedicated to the care of human remains, urging museum professionals to consider the origin of the materials and the wishes of their descendants or other stakeholder groups (NATHIST, 2013). It states that “human remains should only be displayed or used for scientific purposes where the highest professional standards can be implemented” (NATHIST, 2013). Respecting human dignity is at the core of this code. The HOME Recommendations also refer to the Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections, which were published by the German Museums Association in 2013. They emphasise the need to develop provenance research methodologies in collaboration with Congolese academics. More specifically, they caution against DNA investigations and prohibit Belgian museums from conducting such invasive research without the consent of Congolese communities (HOME, 2023).

Training for the best: Issues and challenges

The initial observations and interviews I conducted in museums and university museums indicate that those responsible for human remains collections hail from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines, including art history, history, museology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, physical anthropology and biomedical sciences. This diversity shows the multiple issues behind these collections, while it is one of the biggest challenges to train the next generations. As far as I know, there is no specific training in the care of human/ancestral remains held in museum collections offered by Belgian universities. For example, the master’s degree in museology at the University of Liège in French-speaking Wallonia does not offer courses on sensitive collections related to the State’s colonial past, although they could help raise professionals’ awareness of these issues. In 2025, however, a master’s thesis was dedicated to a skull from Papua New Guinea whose history remained incomplete and is preserved in the university’s collections (Scherberich, 2025). There are also no courses in provenance research, even though improving knowledge of the acquisitions and history of colonial collections is at the core of any repatriation process. Collections of human/ancestral remains have their own specificities and significant challenges regarding this provenance research. Should we focus on geographical origins, the identity of the individuals or the history of the collections? Such research requires an interdisciplinary background and skills, ranging from morphological analysis to consulting archives, complemented by oral history in Congo. Building strong methodologies in Belgium and in Congo should be amongst the goals to achieve in the next few years.

In the context of ICOM’s decolonising process and the drafting of an updated version of the Code of Ethics, I would like to invite all my colleagues to collaborate on these specific collections and consider the best practices for training future generations.

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² The Code insists on the need to care for them respectfully, “with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from which the objects originated, where these are known” (ICOM, 2004).

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Developing academic training curricula for post-digital museology

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The rapid integration of digital technologies into museum practices has given rise to post-digital museology, the museology of an era when digitality is no longer seen as novel but as an inherent condition of contemporary life (Parry, 2013; Bounia, 2021; 2023). This shift necessitates a rethinking of how museum professionals are trained to navigate the complexities of the post-digital era. Recent research has made it clear that museum professionals in different parts of the world are still not equipped with the necessary digital skills that will allow them to respond to the needs of contemporary institutions (see Barnes et al., 2018; Carvalho & Matos, 2018; Catapoti et al., 2020; Nikolaou, 2024). These needs became even stronger during and after the pandemic that changed the way communications are happening in many different fields, including museums (Bounia et al., 2022).

This brief paper aims to explore the development of academic training curricula for post-digital museology: curricula that will address the evolving skills, knowledge, and ethical considerations required for museum professionals to thrive in this new landscape. As museums increasingly adopt digital tools for curation, engagement, and dissemination, professionals must be equipped to handle hybrid models that blend physical and digital experiences. Furthermore, the post-digital condition raises pressing ethical and political questions, such as digital repatriation, data ownership, and decolonization, which must be addressed in museum training programs at all levels.

Drawing on secondary data from global research projects and primary data from interviews with multigenerational museum professionals in Greece, this paper will identify key areas where academic training curricula must evolve. By rethinking and enhancing academic and other training curricula, museum staff can be better prepared to lead in a post-digital world, ensuring that their institutions remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of contemporary society. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the future of museology and will offer practical recommendations for developing training programs that align with the demands of the post-digital era.

The paper will discuss the identified core competencies for digital museum professional training, and then will focus on the pedagogical principles and ethical requirements that need to be considered in curricula planning.

There is a deeply felt urgency for redefining professional training for the museum sector taking into consideration not just digital tools, but a deeper understanding of what digitality means, how it affects museum work and what is possible with/through it.

Core competencies, or technology is not enough...

As the museum sector transitions into a post-digital paradigm, professionals are expected to possess a wide-ranging and dynamic skill set that goes beyond traditional museological competencies. Based on studies such as the Mu.SA Competence Framework (Mu.SA Project, 2019) and the One-by-One

initiative (Ross et al., 2019), several core competency domains emerge as essential for contemporary museum work.

Digital literacy and technological proficiency

Being able to use various digital technologies confidently and efficiently for different purposes is at the core of digital literacy. Looking at this more closely, we can argue that this includes familiarity with content management systems (CMS), digital asset management (DAM) platforms, metadata standards and digitisation tools. The Mu.SA framework, for example, explicitly includes competencies such as managing digital collections, using collaborative platforms and understanding digital preservation workflows as central for museum work in our times (Mu.SA Project, 2019).

However, this does not relate to technological aspects alone; Mihailidis and Cohen (2013) define digital literacy as the ability to access, evaluate and create digital content using critical thinking and ethical awareness. For museum professionals, this means not only operating technical systems but also understanding how these tools influence curatorial decisions and public engagement.

Data management and digital preservation

Digital curation involves not just creating digital surrogates of physical objects but ensuring their long-term accessibility, integrity and interpretability. According to Jones (2016), museum professionals must be trained in lifecycle data management, including selection, description, storage and reusability of digital assets. As heritage institutions increasingly rely on cloud infrastructure and open-access repositories, knowledge of metadata schemas (e.g., Dublin Core, CIDOC CRM) and file format standards becomes indispensable. Without such skills, institutions risk digital obsolescence and data loss.

In our discussions with museum professionals, it was obvious that lack of understanding of digital curation principles and considering digitization a “technological tool” rather than a method of thinking has led to serious difficulties in very practical aspects of museum work, like documentation of their collections.

Audience engagement and digital storytelling

With the proliferation of digital media, museum narratives are increasingly being shaped through multimedia platforms and participatory models. As Simon (2010) suggested, museums have evolved from authoritative spaces into conversational arenas where audiences contribute meaningfully to interpretation. Training should thus include competencies in digital storytelling, social media strategies and community engagement through online platforms. Interactive and immersive technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and AI-driven personalization also require curators and educators to rethink interpretive strategies in spatial and experiential terms (Kenderdine, 2021). It is not about the technology used every time, but it is about the rationale behind choices, ideas and their implementation. AI brings many opportunities to enhance visitor experiences by offering personalised tours, real-time information, different experiences and multiple perspectives and so much more. It brings the need to reconsider visitor experience in total, and this can only be done by museum staff who feel confident to engage in this critical reconsideration, being digitally literate and capable, instead of merely technology proficient.

Inclusive and accessible design

Prioritizing inclusive design in both physical and digital interfaces is central in the post-digital museology thinking. This includes applying Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and designing for neurodiverse and physically impaired users (Fisseler, 2021). Accessibility is more than a legal requirement; it is a democratic imperative that involves not just co-creation with communities and audiences but a holistic approach to inclusivity as a value (DeNagy, 2025). Therefore, it is imperative for museum

professionals to be trained in human-centred design, accessibility auditing and universal user experience strategies.

Ethical and legal literacy

The digital turn has introduced complex ethical and legal challenges. Professionals must be fluent in intellectual property rights, open access licensing (e.g., Creative Commons) and data privacy regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). However, beyond compliance, ethical literacy involves cultural sensitivity, transparency and reflexivity in content representation and algorithmic governance (Boast, 2011). For instance, digitising and displaying Indigenous artefacts without appropriate community consultation risks perpetuating colonial power dynamics in the digital space.

Change management and strategic thinking

Finally, the post-digital professional must be an institutional change agent. This entails the capacity to lead digital transformation, align technology with mission-driven goals, and foster a culture of innovation. Digital strategy is not about technology alone – it is about vision, values and long-term sustainability (Tallon, 2013; see also Cameron, 2021). Therefore, training programs should integrate modules on project management, agile workflows and digital leadership to build institutional resilience, as well as clear and good understanding of sustainability principles, and values connecting to the protection of human, non-human and post human worlds.

Pedagogical principles and ethical dimensions in designing museum training curricula

Designing effective training curricula for museum professionals in a post-digital context requires not only a recalibration of skills and content but also a critical reassessment of how learning occurs within and beyond institutional settings. Given the complexity and ethical weight of digital transformation, pedagogy must be both reflexive and inclusive. The post-digital professional is a lifelong learner, embedded in an environment of rapid change and shifting power dynamics. This necessitates educational strategies that are interdisciplinary, participatory and ethically grounded.

I would like to propose and highlight four parameters or models that need to be considered when designing museum training curricula:

Constructivist and experiential learning models

Traditional approaches to museum training are increasingly inadequate in the face of evolving technological and social conditions. Instead, constructivist pedagogies, pedagogies that emphasise active, learner-centred approaches, are better suited for developing digital fluency and ethical sensitivity. Applying to museum contexts what has been called “constructive alignment” (Biggs & Tang, 2011) – approaches to learning where learning objectives, teaching activities, and assessment methods are all coherently integrated to support deep learning – may involve hands-on digital labs, project-based learning and critical simulations of ethical dilemmas in digitisation, data use or visitor tracking. Such models are further reinforced by findings from the One-by-One project, which emphasizes that digital literacy in museums is cultivated not through isolated workshops but through embedded, iterative learning experiences within professional practice (Ross et al., 2019). By grounding learning in the real-world challenges of museum work, professionals are more likely to retain skills and apply them adaptively.

Interdisciplinary curricula design

Given the hybrid nature of post-digital museums, curricula must cross disciplinary boundaries. Digital technologies in museums intersect with fields as diverse as computer science, media studies, anthropology, design, but also sustainability, environmental sciences and ecology. Therefore, interdisciplinary

approaches encourage critical thinking not just about technology but more importantly about the implications of technology. For example, a module on artificial intelligence in exhibitions might pair technical content (such as natural language processing) with ethical analysis (such as bias in algorithms or misrepresentation of marginalized communities and people in museum narratives, or the impact of AI and other digital developments on the planet and its resources).

Ethics as a foundational pedagogical pillar

Ethical considerations have always been central to museum practice. Museums are not neutral spaces – they are inherently political, implicated in the production and dissemination of knowledge and cultural values. When it comes to digital engagement strategies, these must also confront issues of representation, ownership and participation, particularly when dealing with colonial histories, contested artefacts or different forms of traumatic history. It is therefore important that curricula embed ethical reasoning throughout rather than confining it to standalone courses, as is often the case. Prospective museum professionals should be introduced to frameworks such as ethical design, digital rights management, and community consultation practices. For example, when it comes to Indigenous data sovereignty, technology must be critically scrutinized in terms of who benefits, who is excluded and how power is distributed, exactly in the same way that traditional museum data management should be scrutinized (see also Christen, 2012). Ethics is about fostering institutional accountability and social justice in all terrains, digital and physical. Therefore, introducing ethics as a core pillar for any museum training professional curriculum means the recognition that ethical knowledge, especially in rapidly evolving digital contexts, is co-constructed rather than passively received; it means that diversity, equity and inclusion are deeply embedded in all practices and pedagogical processes. Therefore, a training programme that puts ethics at its core can help shift institutional cultures toward openness and accountability.

Conclusions

The emergence of post-digital museology challenges long-held assumptions about what it means to be a museum professional. It builds upon earlier efforts in digital museology but moves beyond the novelty of digitisation and web-based outreach to emphasize systemic integration, critical reflection and institutional transformation (Cameron & Kenderdine, 2007; Parry, 2010). Therefore, museum professionals' training calls for a comprehensive shift from training in technical matters towards integrative, ethically grounded and context-sensitive learning. Museum professionals must be empowered not only to use digital tools but to question them, adapt them and co-create with their audiences through them.

As a result, effective training curricula need to be grounded in interdisciplinary content, driven by learner-centred pedagogy and rooted in ethical engagement. The challenge is considerable, but the opportunity is greater still: to cultivate a new generation of cultural stewards equipped to navigate the complex terrain of the post-digital world with skill, integrity and imagination.

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The matter of language – EUROTOALES and language as intangible cultural heritage in museums

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Who built Thebes of the seven gates? wondered Bertold Brecht in a famous poem. EUROTOALES - Museum of the Voices of Europe project (www.eurotales.eu), seeks to find exhibition strategies that could answer a question similar to Brecht's and attempt to represent linguistic memory, offering an experimental method of exhibiting the linguistic heritage of a territory in all its plurality and complexity without getting caught up in “national” categories, which are the only ones with the necessary solidity to constitute a recognised object of research.



Figure 1: EUROTOALES – Building a museum lab of the Voices of Europe, Università di Roma la Sapienza, Rome, 2022, © Eurotales Museum.

Our territory is Europe, understood in the broadest sense, bounded by the Urals in the east, the shores of the Mediterranean in the south and the Atlantic in the west. How can we give substance and voice to the variety of ways in which people living today and in the past on our continent communicate? How can we recognise, describe and preserve languages in their dynamic relationship with European history? Who “owns” language and in what forms? Are national languages, official languages, popular

languages, minority languages, vernacular languages, dialects, creoles and grammelot really the only ways in which languages manifest themselves? What exactly do these categories encompass and are they adequate for classifying modes of human communication?

To answer these questions, EUROTALLES is collecting information that is being compiled into four large, constantly updated databases, which constitute the structural components of the museum and website:

- Resonances Today
- Resonances Past
- Traces
- Milestones (Timeline)

Resonances Today collects data on the linguistic biographies of students, visitors and the general public. This is a well-established methodology in sociolinguistic research: Questionnaires anonymously collect information on the mother tongues, languages of instruction and everyday languages of the interviewees and their parents and grandparents, constructing individual family trees of the languages active in the community. To date, we have collected about 5,000 of these, which have yielded a perhaps unprecedented narrative: 243 languages and dialects named by respondents, 14% of which are European languages, 25% non-European and 61% dialects.

The value of this collection is twofold:

1. It encourages visitors and contributors to reflect on the languages which are active in their own awareness and experience;
2. It shows the inherently plural nature of any individual's linguistic culture.

Resonances Past collects the same information, but on figures from the past who are significant for the cultural history of Europe. The linguistic data can be queried based on the languages or territories of birth and residence of the figures studied. To date, there are about 300 complete files.

Language biographies and genealogies capture the fragments and memories nourishing the plurality of languages in our societies, past and present, and may be searched and represented graphically for different sub-groups on the EUROTALLES website (Cannata, 2023).

For the museum premises in Rome, we are elaborating an application entitled *Resonances & Reflections* which will generate artistic renditions of linguistic genealogies, allowing visitors to compare their own personal linguistic biographies with those of known historical figures through artworks that assign similar values to similar elements in individual linguistic histories. A sister project transforms linguistic biographies and genealogies into musical lines (Cannata et al., 2020).

Traces collects the linguistic memories that constitute the linguistic archaeology of territories, which are preserved because of their connection to material objects. Language *traces* are linguistic events, oral or written, often fragmentary, embedded within or wedded to material objects and places and whose memory echoes through that tangible host. Illustrating the deep and layered relationship between material objects and their intangible significance, *traces* represent the linguistic dimension of place and material culture. Just as languages live in people, they leave traces of their presence in objects, landscapes and traditions (Cannata et al., 2022). Place names carry with them the memory of the peoples who inhabited the territory; songs and legends carry the oral memory of cultures and traditions; public script convey languages considered representative of the culture of the communities that produce them, giving them a political or civil function; graffiti and impromptu writings often mark a break with that order and the expression of a political or civil message in a different language or variety; painting and the figurative arts reveal captions, artists' signatures, examples of creative writing in a surprising variety of languages, dictated by choices that are both communicative and, perhaps more often, symbolic, and

whose interpretation offers insights of great interest for the contextual study of the linguistic culture of communities and territories (Cousins, 2022).

Intangible linguistic heritage both unites and divides communities and invites the development of new research methodologies for cataloguing cultural products that are constantly evolving and particularly difficult to preserve and describe. Taken together, *Traces* demonstrates the archaeology and fecundity of language change and interaction in space by referring to the most important aspect of language: its meaning. On the website, one can also use search engines to create thematic itineraries through the DIFFUSEUM, a term we coined from the innovative idea of the *museo diffuso*.

Finally, the *Timeline* collects the history of individual European languages organised into six categories: first attestations, canonical texts, political events, institutional interventions, media, language and gender. To date, we have data for 28 languages. The *Timeline* functions as a check on the value of our democratic approach, comparing the worm's eye collections of *Traces* and *Resonances* to foundational events or *Milestones* in the histories of individual languages represented on physical and virtual timelines. Ultimately the idea of the worm's eye collections of *Traces* and *Resonances* is to disrupt the more standard linguistic histories represented in the *Milestones*.

EUROTALES and the world of language museums

Most language museums take the more traditional approach of EUROTALES' *Milestones* collection. One may divide the language museums of today into four typologies, each of which possesses different stakeholders and a different range of relationships to data, visitors and source communities (Cannata et al., 2020):

- **Geography-Based Museums** privilege the interaction of a multiplicity of languages in geographical space, placing a premium on engaging linguistic communities across large territories. Stressing inclusivity and harmony across tongues, these museums aim to illustrate the richness of linguistic diversity, count a variety of linguistic stakeholders, and engage with communities in a way that transcends individual language usage. They typically offer eco-museological perspectives and approaches. EUROTALES (Rome, Italy, 2022) is a geography-based language museum. Another geographic language museum is the Canadian Language Museum (Toronto, Canada, 2011), also a university museum.
- **Linguistics-Based Museums** display linguistic principles, often abstract, and language families, including phonetics, grammar and lexical variation. These museums sometimes showcase great linguists and often include language games and historical language trees. Only weakly wedded to communities, linguistics-based museums have difficulty engaging with concepts of identity or memory, and therefore they possess few natural stakeholders other than possibly children for whom the displays are often geared. Such museums are the rarest type of language museum. Examples include the National Museum of Language, currently a virtual institution (Baltimore, USA, 1997); Grimmwelt, established around the figures of the Grimm brothers, who were linguists (Kassel, Germany, 2015); and Mundolingua, which is the broadest ranging and most ambitious of the linguistics-based museums to date (Paris, France, 2013).
- **Museums of Writing and Scripts** focus on how writing conveys language. Like linguistics-based museums, they usually offer a wide range of languages. Of all language museums, these are the most object based as they display objects with different scripts so that visitors can see authentic examples. Sometimes the displays directly link to archaeological or anthropological museums, but they generally engage few stakeholders since the cultural net embraced by the displays is so wide and the approach is often abstract. Examples include the Musée Champollion; Les Ecritures du Monde, which began in 1986 as a museum about the Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion (Figeac, France, 2007); the National Museum of World Writing, established in contrast to an earlier institution concentrated on Hangul script (Incheon, Korea,

2023); and Museum of Writing and Research Collection created in an English university context (London, UK, 2010).

- **Language-Based Museums** safeguard local or national languages from either extinction or unwanted change. They may have a public or a research orientation or both. Language-based museums are tightly associated with individual languages and derive their visitorship and sponsorship largely from those speakers whose languages provide vigorous communities of stakeholders. Museums of individual languages are diverse and include Erlebniswelt Deutsche Sprache for German, stemming from a 17th century language society set up to develop the language's first grammars and dictionaries (Anhalt, Germany, 2013); Afrikaanse Taalmuseum en-Monument, which started as an apartheid political project to preserve Afrikaans culture in South Africa but then transformed into a museum embracing all Afrikaans speakers (Paarl, South Africa, 1975); Sòn de Lenga Espaci Occitan created to preserve Occitan culture, which straddles Southeastern France and Northwestern Italy (Dronero, Italy, 2002); and Planet Word, opened to encourage literacy in the English language, including English sign language (Washington DC, USA, 2020).

Language-based museums are the largest category of language museums today, with about 95% of language museums being museums of individual languages created, on some level, to preserve the culture of a single language and its community of speakers.

Almost all existing language museums were founded in the 21st century, and many of those established in the previous century were refashioned into language museums in the 21st century, raising questions as to why recent decades have witnessed the minting of so many museums dedicated to language — museums that display something we generally cannot see. The simple answer is that language is held very dear by all humankind, while recently museum institutions have broadened their missions to include more intangible cultural heritage (Munjeri, 2004; Stefano & Davis, 2017; Turgeon, 2010).

Conclusion

What is critical and novel in all of EUROTALLES' collections is the common approach to language from a worm's eye view: how language is used "on the ground", so to speak. We aim at retrieving from both intangible (people) and tangible (places, objects) heritage the memory of languages, and the names people over time have used to define them.

Language is, creates, and preserves our cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Focusing our output (collections and displays) on real-life uses of languages of the past and the present allows a broad range of audiences and stakeholders to build up knowledge of languages, their individual and shared characteristics, their intermingling and changing, and to understand the dynamic cultural heritage that they encapsulate, illustrate and express. This bottom-up approach is also what excites visitors and students and allows them to contribute meaningfully to the research and museum, even as non-specialists.

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Religious museums and practices for inclusion: The Italian case

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Museums today serve not only territorial and cultural communities, but also address broader dimensions such as religion, which continues to shape the lives of a large segment of the global population.

This paper focuses on ecclesiastical museums – those linked to institutions of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy – highlighting their distinct identity. These museums are rooted in dual objectives: they serve both the community of the faithful and a wider, more diverse audience. Professionals working in ecclesiastical museums must be equipped to handle this complexity. Their training must respond to the dual imperative of preserving and interpreting collections while fostering inclusivity for all visitors.

There is a significant number of museums in Italy connected to religious institutions or dedicated primarily to religious heritage. More than 800 such institutions exist,¹ most of them small, the vast majority affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (Santi, 2012).

Their collections are diverse: they include liturgical objects from churches and institutions such as convents, oratories, and chapels. Many also preserve artifacts that reflect over two millennia of Church history, from items representing various global cultures to everyday objects belonging to saints or prominent ecclesiastical figures.

Some of these museums have ancient origins, such as the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan, founded in 1618, while many others – particularly diocesan museums – have been established in recent decades, especially since the early 2000s.

Ecclesiastical museums are characterized by their unique ecclesial dimension, which extends beyond mere ownership. They embody a set of values and functions that reflect the religious community they serve. Notably, these institutions are considered pastoral tools for faith communities. This pastoral mission has been formally recognized in key documents such as the circular letter, *The Pastoral Function*

1 A precise and up-to-date figure on the total number of Italian ecclesiastical museums does not exist because there are many very small collections that do not meet the minimum operating standards. The figure of approximately 800 museums corresponds to a thorough census conducted from 2005 to 2011 by Giancarlo Santi for AMEI (Association of Italian Ecclesiastical Museums). With regard to up-to-date data, 2,415 institutes are currently registered in the Anagrafe degli Istituti Culturali Ecclesiastici (AICE), managed by the Italian Bishops' Conference, of which 1,414 are archives, 670 libraries and 331 museums. The Register includes institutes that are voluntarily registered and meet the minimum operating criteria.

of Ecclesiastical Museums (Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church,² 2001), as well as in various initiatives within the Catholic heritage field.³

For nearly 30 years, professionals in these institutions have had a national association of reference: AMEI (Associazione Musei Ecclesiastici Italiani). AMEI serves as a platform for dialogue, supporting both the ecclesiastical network and broader museum community⁴ in enhancing the effectiveness of museum practices.

Through its activities – research, training sessions, and professional exchange – AMEI has played a key role in identifying and addressing the specific educational needs of staff working in ecclesiastical museums. While not the only actor in this field,⁵ it is the only organization in Italy dedicated exclusively to supporting ecclesiastical museum professionals. This training course, aimed at professionals working in the field of religious cultural heritage, focuses in particular on continuing education.

In earlier years, AMEI prioritized aligning ecclesiastical museums with general museum standards – focusing on management, communication,⁶ accessibility, and inclusivity.⁷ This was especially important for smaller or more remote institutions with limited personnel and resources.⁸ The broader transformation of the Italian museum landscape, culminating in the creation of the National Museum System⁹ in 2018, also influenced ecclesiastical museums. Many of them began to adapt to national standards and to engage actively with training opportunities offered by institutions such as the National Fondazione Scuola dei beni e delle attività culturali.¹⁰

So, currently, the focus of training has shifted toward more specialized themes, particularly those related to interpreting religious collections in ways that are meaningful both to practicing believers and to those outside the faith. Over the past decade, there has been growing recognition of the lack of inclusive interpretive practices within ecclesiastical museums, particularly regarding their ability to communicate the significance of religious cultural heritage (Capurro, 2013; Paine, 2013).

2 This Commission was a pontifical institution (since 2012 its functions have been incorporated into the Pontifical Council for Culture), so the documents it issued are addressed to the universal Church, that is, to the entire Catholic world. Other documents have been produced by local church institutions, such as national episcopal conferences.

3 Among these, the contribution of the Italian Episcopal Conference through the Office for Cultural Heritage and Religious Buildings is fundamental.

4 Together with ICOM Italy and six other national museum associations, AMEI is part of the Permanent Conference of Museum Associations.

5 The Italian Episcopal Conference organizes training courses in collaboration with universities and other educational institutions. Some Italian and pontifical universities (Vatican universities) also offer specialized courses on ecclesiastical cultural heritage (e.g. the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan).

6 One example is the 9th AMEI Conference in 2013 entitled *The network of ecclesiastical museums: from economic tool to interpretative laboratory*. Another example was the course *Managing Ecclesiastical Museums*, held in 2018 in collaboration with AMEI, the Gregorian University and the National Office for Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage and Religious Buildings of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

7 Examples include the 11th AMEI Conference in 2017 dedicated to intercultural and interreligious dialogue in ecclesiastical museums and the 12th AMEI Conference in 2019 dedicated to museum accessibility.

8 Ecclesiastical museums are classified as private museums under Italian law. Staff recruitment is managed by the owners and, in many cases, only a small number of professionals are part of the permanent staff. In the case of smaller museums, the management of day-to-day activities is entrusted to volunteers.

9 The National Museum System is a project coordinated by the Italian General Directorate of Museums that aims to network almost 5,000 Italian museums and cultural sites. All public or private cultural sites can access the System on a voluntary basis and through an accreditation process.

10 *Fondazione Scuola dei beni e delle attività culturali* is a foundation dedicated to training, research and higher education, founded by the Italian Ministry of Culture.

Situated in a context where Catholic culture remains dominant, these museums often maintain strong ties with faith communities while remaining less accessible to other audiences. A clear example is the prevalence of “diocesan museums” – a term that may be unfamiliar or opaque to the general public.¹¹

To fulfill their mission, ecclesiastical museums must acknowledge both the historical-artistic and the ritual-liturgical significance of their collections, whether those rituals are still practiced or have ceased. As time passes, however, the perception of such heritage changes: symbolic meanings may be lost, misunderstood, or diminished.

This is particularly true for items such as ecclesiastical furnishings, whose interpretation has become more complex in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and the resulting liturgical reforms. Many such items are no longer in use, and it falls to the museum to convey their original purpose and significance (Wellington Gahtan, 2015). There are also cases of sensitive religious cultural heritage that require special attention in terms of display and mediation, such as human remains considered holy relics (Ricco, 2022).

The museum, therefore, plays a crucial role in restoring relevance to these collections and reestablishing the link between community and cultural heritage.

Another essential area of training concerns the ability to engage diverse audiences. Ecclesiastical museums are increasingly recognized as potential instruments of dialogue, not only among the faithful but also among broader local communities¹² and other publics. Awareness-raising activities and targeted training have led several institutions to rethink their approach to inclusion. This has resulted in new interpretive strategies and educational programs specifically designed to foster inclusive engagement (Capurro & Primerano, 2018).

In conclusion, the case of ecclesiastical museums illustrates that while general training is essential across the museum sector, there are also unique educational needs that must be addressed to support the specific mission of these institutions. In particular, knowledge of the collections must include their historical or active relationship with their function – whether liturgical, ritual, devotional, etc. – while knowledge of the audience must account for varying levels of connection or distance from the collections in order to promote inclusive and respectful action. Finally, the design of interpretive tools and educational services must enhance and communicate the complexity of these institutions’ mission.

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¹¹ A diocese is an ecclesiastical region under the responsibility of a bishop. The boundaries of dioceses do not correspond to those of administrative regions.

¹² It is worth noting that church museum collections are often part of the cultural identity of local communities, not just for the faithful.

The future of museology in India: Challenges and transformations

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Museology as an academic discipline and practicing profession endeavours to find the theoretical basis of museum work, in particular, heritage institutions, aiming at a further development and improvement of activities of these institutions, not only on the basis of experience but also on theory. Theory and methodology are the foundations of all aspects of museology. It is a process, the essence of which is the analysis of the idea, purposes, social, economic and cultural roles of the museums in a broader sense. It is the action of housing this objectified reality in a social institution and presenting the natural or man-made object or its symbol for an audience to communicate the associated (interpretative) value – aesthetic, sanctity, curiosity, entertainment or scientific.

India is one of the pioneering countries in the world and institutionalised the professional training course in museology into a specialised academic discipline. Museology as an independent academic discipline in separate university departments started in India much before most of such in the world. Nevertheless, the facts grossly remained unacknowledged so far. The specialty of the post-graduate museology courses in Indian universities has been the equal emphasis on the theory and practice of the core museological principles as well as on the application of basic academic disciplines.

Indian museology courses are presently in transitional stages of incorporating new elements to face the changing global scenario including starting a two-year post-graduate diploma course, currently housed at the Department at the University of Calcutta, offering both MA & MSc degrees incorporating theory, practice, project, dissertation and internship. PhD programs are also conducted under both Science & Arts faculties. Past and present students are from Bangladesh, Canada, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, etc.

Historical background

Necessity for adequate training for proper museum management in India has been felt since 1907. The government of India stressed the need for advanced museum training again in 1912. The Markham and Hargreaves Report on Indian Museums (1936) again highlighted the requirement of professional training. In 1937, the All India Museums Conference elaborated upon such training modalities. Sir Leonard Woolley (1939), too, emphasised staff training. These all are sporadic studies rather following the line of museological perspective, ushered into introducing a structured framework of museology. Soon museology was introduced as a separate subject for study in India.

In university, museology was first introduced in 1936 as a separate paper “Museum Methods” in the post-graduate curriculum of anthropology of the University of Calcutta, though it covered only a small part of museology, mostly conservation of museum objects. All this culminated in starting museology courses at the university level, first in 1952 at Baroda (one-year post-graduate diploma) and in 1959 at Calcutta (two-year post-graduate diploma). UNESCO deputed Professor Philip Rawson to study the museology courses in India. The famous Rawson Report on Museology, 1965 (UNESCO), praised the pioneering effort by saying, “India is leading the world in the university training of museology students.

The post graduate university course first at Baroda and then at Calcutta has set a notable precedent.”

The major museology departments are in the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda (Vadodara), Gujarat; University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal; Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh; Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh; National Museum Institute for History of Art, Conservation and Museology, New Delhi; and Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, West Bengal. Some other centres have come up for training museology at different levels, either directly offering museology as a main subject or incorporating museology in other related subjects like archaeology, archival studies, tourism or heritage studies. Except for the University of Calcutta, almost all the courses above actually resorted to museum training instead of museology *per se*. The thrust areas and strong points of the Calcutta department have throughout been on the equal emphases on application as well as on the theoretical foundation. Practical classes on all the courses, field study, projects, dissertation and internship are the specialty of the curriculum. The department takes students from varied academic disciplines and trains them to have a multidisciplinary approach and acquire multi-tasking ability to cope with the challenging global situation. Unlike other museology courses, the University of Calcutta course does not stress upon museum training only. It approaches the subject in a holistic manner and is definitely an inclusive one, as museology is considered here as “Philosophy of visual interpretation of heritage, be it cultural, natural or scientific” (Chanda, 2008, p. 25). Museums are tools for practising museology and, we believe, museums need museologists for desired functioning.

Challenges in the present museology training in India

Traditionally the focus of these programmes has been on museum history, collection management, conservation techniques and display aesthetics. While these provide a solid foundation in classical museological training, they often overlook emerging fields such as critical theory, decolonisation, public humanities, digital heritage, participatory curation and inclusive accessibility. Currently, the museology courses in Indian universities are in transitional stages of incorporating new elements to face the changing global scenario.

The future of museology relies on inclusion of diversity, digitisation and sustainability, while maintaining its core focus on preserving and interpreting heritage. The future of museology lies in reimagining museum spaces as dynamic cultural hubs – an interactive space for dialogue, learning and engagement. Museology has to integrate AI-driven curation, online collections, immersive visualisation using AR-VR, blockchain technology for provenance research and authenticity of collections. Sustainability will be as crucial as inclusivity and accessibility in exhibition design, heritage conservation and ensuring authentic narratives. Participatory curation with the communities, multi-sensory experience, pluralistic interactivity and effort for minimizing the digital divide is essential. Thus, the future of museology depends on a balance between technological innovation, ethical responsibility and cultural sustainability.

Community as a stakeholder in museological training

Modern museology increasingly recognises the community not merely as an audience but as co-curators, knowledge-holders and users of heritage spaces. The new museology and social museology paradigms emphasize inclusion, democratisation, and decentralisation of authority. In a diverse and stratified society like India’s, museology must play a role in acknowledging local histories, oral traditions and lived experiences. Training programmes must reflect this ethos by the following measures:

- Introducing community-based research methodologies.
- Training students in participatory practices, oral history documentation and local heritage mapping.
- Promoting ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems.

International trends and lessons for India

Globally, museum training has adapted to address contemporary challenges:

- **Digital museums:** Use of AR/VR, digitised collections and interactive web portals that have been followed in limited museums in India, particularly the science museums.
- **Social inclusion:** Programmes in Latin America and Africa have pioneered social museology – empowering marginalised voices, mostly ignored in India.
- **Museum as forum:** Western institutions embrace dialogue-based exhibitions and citizen curation – rare in India.
- **Decolonial museology:** Emerging practices across Australia and Canada focus on decolonising narratives and restitution, grossly ignored in India.

Indian training institutions can learn from these practices by forging global collaborations, embedding critical theory in curriculum and diversifying museological pedagogy. New developments in museum anthropology or museum ethnography are ignored here.

Policy frameworks and institutional reforms in India

Government policies significantly shape the evolution of museology training. The National Education Policy of 2020 emphasises skill-based, interdisciplinary education and opens doors for revising museology syllabi. Other relevant frameworks include:

- Ministry of Culture's schemes for digitisation and museum modernisation
- Collaboration opportunities through UNESCO and ICOM
- Funding mechanisms via state cultural bodies for museum innovation

There is an urgent need to integrate policy with pedagogical innovation. National and state museums (so far reluctant) should be encouraged to partner with universities as living laboratories for research, training and community interface.

Innovative strategies for museology training in India

Future-ready museology training must adopt several innovations:

- **Digital integration:** Courses on digital archiving, VR curation, AI in collection management. During the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic most of the university museology departments remained closed for almost two years. During the lockdown period, most enhanced their digital capabilities. The Department of Museology in the University of Calcutta could not afford to be lenient in their disposition so that their students did not suffer academically. To supplement physical visits to the museums and heritage institutions, the department negotiated with various authorities to arrange *Virtual Tour in Real Time* for the students in addition to regular online classes on the theoretical components of the curriculum. The unforeseen situation of prolonged COVID-related restrictions compelled them to devise effective methods for conducting online practical classes. Even the department convinced the museums to conduct a three-month long internship programme online. For that, the department had to organise regular sessions with the museum authorities to design the online module. All the examinations were conducted online. Students didn't lose a single day in their academic calendar. Most of the components of the PhD programmes were conducted unhindered in online/hybrid mode, although the laboratories were kept open maintaining proper safety protocols with prior permission from the appropriate authorities. Though e-learning poses a challenge to both students and teachers and definitely cannot be a substitute of the classroom teaching, online educational programmes came as a viable solution to overcome the sudden crisis of the pandemic and are increasingly seen as a new paradigm in the museology and museum training programmes with the aid of

technologies. The pandemic indeed was an eye-opener on the power of training, with its capabilities to effectively change according to the needs and the potential in the adverse situation to keep the supply chain of properly trained personnel open by adapting to digital technologies. This highly innovative museum training programme devised by the Indian museology departments during the pandemic and the lessons learnt carry forward in the post-COVID era for full exploitation.

- **Community internships:** Mandatory fieldwork with local museums, heritage NGOs and cultural activists (present in the University of Calcutta).
- **Skill-based learning:** Inclusion of communication, entrepreneurial, design and education skills.
- **Collaborative pedagogy:** Guest lectures from practitioners, museum professionals and global experts (again present in the University of Calcutta).
- **Flexible curriculum:** Modular courses that allow students to pick museum education, conservation or curatorial design as specializations.

Conclusion and future outlook

India stands at a critical juncture in its museological journey. As museums shift from being temples of knowledge to forums for dialogue and community engagement, training must evolve to support this transition. The future of museology in India lies in bridging the gap between tradition and innovation, between theory and practice and between elite narratives and everyday experiences. A people-centred, digitally competent, interdisciplinary and ethically grounded museology training ecosystem will prepare future professionals not just as museum workers but as cultural stewards and community facilitators. Museology demands interdisciplinary aptitudes and highly developed multi-tasking skills. Therefore, a good museology curriculum must balance between theory and practice and must include varied elements with regional and local variations and needs. Historically rooted in colonial collections and elite interpretations of heritage, the discipline must now evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society. India's demographic diversity, rapid urbanisation, digitisation and shifting notions of cultural identity necessitate a new vision for how museums are imagined, curated and engaged with by communities. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the future of museology training in India within this changing context. We begin with an overview of the current state of museology education in India, followed by an exploration of community needs, technological transformations, global best practices and policy shifts. We propose a reimagining of training in museology that is inclusive, community-oriented and future-ready.

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The role and challenges of a museum in a traditional cultural crafts village in a rapidly changing society

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This paper uses the concept of ecomuseology and the perspective of ICOM's new museum definition to observe the relationship between the role of the Sanyi Woodcarving Museum and the development of community industry and culture. It analyzes how museums affect the local craft industry under the changes in social development and thinks about public museology education.

The case introduction

Sanyi Township has a population of 17,800 and has mainly made a living from the woodcarving industry for more than 100 years. It is close to Taichung City with a population of about 3,000,000. Taiwan's woodcarving industry has gone through several industrial, technological and commercial competitions, and the woodcarving industry in several major cities withdrew from the market 20 years ago. Only the woodcarving industry in Sanyi has undergone several transformations over the past 100 years. The product themes and styles have also changed, but they still survive. This is closely related to the establishment of the local woodcarving museum in 1995.

In the 1980s, the Central Government of Taiwan implemented a policy of balancing urban and rural development in view of their imbalance, which even led to the loss of traditional industries and political turmoil. Twenty-one cultural centers, five national museums, libraries and performing arts halls were built across the country. Sanyi's Woodcarving Museum is a local characteristic museum built under this policy. When the handmade woodcarving furniture industry declined due to the take-off of industrial products, many woodworking masters changed jobs. The Sanyi Woodcarving Museum was established at this time, actively promoting local woodcarvers to engage in creation, hold exhibitions and competitions, and enhance the sense of honor and existence value of unknown woodcarvers. Sanyi's woodcarving village has survived.¹

However, since 2000, Taiwan has faced the relocation of traditional industries². Sanyi seeks craft transformation and repositioning of local culture.

Problems discussion

How to promote community services due to the lack of manpower and professionalism in local museums?

Local museums have limited resources and professional manpower, so it is ideal to combine museums with community residents. However, there is a shortage of staff because most of the few employees employed by the museum do not have the professional ability to serve the community. So, the Community

1 For nearly half a century, Taiwan has experienced the challenge of balancing urban and rural development, local revitalization, and governance of emerging large cities. Among the policies and plans of the government to guide the phased urban and rural development, there are important projects related to museums, which promote museums and urban and rural development to complement each other.

2 Because mainland China and countries in Southeast Asia are low in wages and timber. Abundant resources reduce market costs, and industrial export is difficult in Taiwan.

Empowerment and Development Policy is handled by local governments through other administrative plans.

An eco-museum is a museum form that emphasizes local culture, ecology, and community participation, incorporating the entire natural environment and cultural landscape into its business scope, emphasizing local history, environmental protection, and community development. However, it is difficult for the original museum staff to handle community-related work.

Therefore, how to adapt to the new definition of ICOM? The tasks of museums should be expanded in the direction of community service; manpower and professionalism are the main issues.

If more citizen volunteers participate in museums, there should be some education courses on Museum and Community Development.

How to improve the quality of life of residents due to the loss to urban areas of the rural populations?

Under the trend of continuous development of population and area in large cities, the population of small towns is rapidly declining, and the youth population is migrating. How can museums find new motivation for residents? How to improve the information life of residents? How to rebuild young people's feelings of love for their hometown?

How to promote industrial transformation due to the decline of the traditional handicraft market and the fault of inheritance?

The loss of traditional craft industries is due to market changes, craftsmen changing jobs, and disruptions in family inheritance. In the past half century, under the development of industrial technology and the globalization of the trade market, the traditional handicraft industry has ceased to be a common commodity and has rapidly lost its competitiveness in the market for people's livelihood. In particular, small townships that rely on traditional crafts to make a living have been greatly affected.

The traditional woodcarving process is inherited through the master-apprentice system, making it difficult to attract the younger generation to join, and the skills are facing loss. The modern school education system is out of the context of craft inheritance, resulting in inheritance faults.

How do local craft museums drive local economic transformation? How to improve the quality of residents' lives? How to drive young people to understand the value of traditional crafts and generate new creative abilities? How to cooperate with the school's education?

The image of townships is aging and tourism competitiveness is lost

The aging business model of the stores, the epidemic cut-off of the source of tourists, the sales targets of products do not meet the new trend groups, the vast mountain and forest land resources have no environmental beautification, and there is no plan to create a "back garden of a big city". These are the factors that cause Sanyi Township to lose its tourism power.

How can museums create new visions, influence the display aesthetics of merchant design, promote excellent merchants and special products, and develop cultural and innovative products through education and training to attract young people's tourism interest and purchasing power?

Sanyi Woodcarving Museum's operational strategy and development suggestions

The transformation of the woodcarving industry in Sanyi has been proposed by scholars: It could be promoted in combination with five aspects: culture, tourism, innovation, education and marketing.

The Woodcarving Museum has carried out promotion plans based on driving the development of local industries, promoting tourism activities, attracting tourists to visit the museum, and using online media to strengthen marketing.

Embed product design with culture

For a hundred years, the Sanyi woodcarving industry has mostly relied on national policies and trade opportunities to produce. Products have always relied on market transformation and have no local historical and cultural context, so it is easy to be out-competed by neighboring countries with low wages and low prices of timber, with imitated products and the stealing of the trade market.

So, the revival of Sanyi woodcarving art industry must create its own cultural characteristics and values and establish cultural trademarks.

How can museums help establish this cultural trademark?

- Find local themes: From local natural landscapes, local historical stories, and common memories of local residents, find unique flower and tree themes, commemorative figures, new local landmarks, local beliefs and customs, etc. Organize exhibitions to select outstanding artists' works with cultural characteristics and creativity and assist in establishing a certification system.
- Craftsmen are encouraged to create and participate in national and international exhibitions, establish artist awareness, encourage collection, cooperate with the art market to promote art fairs, and build art market value. Get rid of the inferior selling price of imitations.

Tourist experience

There are hundreds of shops selling woodcarvings on the streets of Sanyi, but the products come from all over China and Southeastern countries with local products mixed in, so the origin is unclear and the characteristics of local artists cannot be recognized, which reduces the charm of local culture.

- To promote tourism, it is necessary to have the attraction of local characteristics, local culture, and natural landscapes, including local food, convenient public transportation, and local sight-seeing minibuses. At present, there are no public facilities for a small tourist town. Promotional materials are rare, and there is a big gap compared to the publicity effectiveness of well-known craft towns in Japan and Europe.
- The museum is an important base for promoting local cultural tourism, promoting the development of the Sanyi woodcarving industry, collecting and exhibiting the excellent works of local craftsmen. The museum and the studios of local woodcarving craftsmen have website information to promote local woodcarving DIY workshops: open tours, experience carving, take-home souvenirs made by visitors, etc. Establish international exchanges with woodcarving artists, organize international woodcarving art exhibitions, and enhance the popularity of local woodcarving craftsmen.

Introduce new technologies for wood craftsmanship and encourage product design innovation

- **Encourage and promote innovation in materials and tools:** Use domestic materials and recycled wood to align with environmental trends and conduct workshops to introduce the development of designs suitable for the characteristics of these materials.
- **Guide cross-border cooperation and improve design capabilities:** Guide craftsmen to collaborate and dialogue with well-known designers, architects, and artists, integrating woodcarving elements into cultural and creative products, furniture, public art and even architectural design, and opening up new application markets.
- **Use digital technology to assist and improve construction technology:** Workshops introduce 3D scanning, CNC digital engraving and other technologies to study and process rough

embryos and other highly repetitive technologies and tools. This allows craftsmen to focus more on overall shape design, detailed carving and artistic expression, thus improving production efficiency.

Talent cultivation and inheritance

After the popularization of twelve years of compulsory education leading to social and economic growth in Taiwan, the number of poor children decreased, and the number of students apprenticed to handicrafts old masters decreased. The lack of technical courses in Taiwan's high schools has seriously affected the demand for skilled workers and manpower. There are very few young people who rely on craft creation to make a living. They have no skills and can only make a living from the service industry. Therefore, the handicraft industry declined quickly because there was no inheritance of young people to participate.

The handicraft industry is both a technology and an art, and the woodcarving industry needs both. If young people do not have such an experience when they are young, it will be difficult to find another Ju Ming.³

The museum promotes the inheritance of and education on craftsmanship:

- Inspirational lessons for junior classes
- Introducing craftsmen to demonstrate teaching in middle schools
- A summer work camp that guides young people to participate in the design and production of woodcarvings
- Inviting craftsmen to the museum to set up a resident studio to accept interested citizens to participate in learning and production
- Providing a platform for citizens and young people to display crafts work

Diversified marketing and expansion

- For excellent shops that exhibit and sell the products of local craftsmen, the museum can give certified posters to improve the credibility of the shops
- The museum can provide lectures on the use of social media and live streaming, online exhibitions, short videos, and videos showcasing the creative process and the stories behind the works to attract potential collectors and enthusiasts from around the world
- It can promote international exchanges, conduct exchanges, and learn from experience

Conclusion

The future of the Sanyi woodcarving industry should no longer rely on the models of copying the past, mass production, and OEM. The tourism industry should be combined with local resources. Through the joint efforts of museums, governments, associations, industry operators, and creators, combining traditional skills with modern life, aesthetics, and technology, Sanyi woodcarvings can refine new vitality from challenges and continue to shine on the world craft stage. These reforms require museums, governments, associations, industry operators, and creators, as well as relevant knowledge and professional capabilities on the concept of eco-museums.

We need to develop a curriculum for mass museology. What is mass museology? This concept mainly comes from eco-museology and means to strengthen the publicity and cross-domain symbiosis of museums: Collaborate with schools, enterprises, etc., and become an important hub connecting local history, culture, and community people. The subject includes museum operators, people from industries other than museums, community residents, and the general public. It includes cooperation with various departments of the university to hold courses, invite local elders, social construction personnel,

³ A famed Taiwanese master sculptor who died in 2023.

etc. to hold workshops with the public, and through community field surveys exchange learning and review, so that residents can be the co-curators of the museum.

Baltic Museology School – Project for building museum sector capacity

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In considering strategies for enhancing the capacity and sustainability of the museum sector, we would like to share our experience in creating and implementing the Baltic Museology School (hereinafter – BMS) project, while at the same time trying to reflect on the role of museum theory (museology) and practical museum work (museography) in ensuring professional museum practice.

Our story about the joint continuing education project for museum professionals from the three Baltic States – Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia – began well before its official launch in 2004. In 1993, news of the International Summer School of Museology at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, reached the Baltic States. In the following years, museum professionals from the Baltics also participated in this school. Getting acquainted with the theory of museology developed by Zbyněk Stránský and the opportunity to learn from the school's lecturers – outstanding museum theorists and practitioners – opened new horizons in our understanding of museum work. Stránský's perspective on the goal of museology – to elevate our work to a professional level – was truly inspiring. "Only qualified museum workers can defend and represent museums in the world of today and create solid ground on which they can safely enter the 21st century," wrote Stránský (1995). The questions that arose – about the essence of museum work, why society needs museums, the role of theory in museum practice, and other "eternal questions" – became an integral part of our thinking.

When the socio-political systems of the Baltic States changed in the early 1990s and the countries regained their sovereignty, there was a need to review the education system for museum professionals. Each Baltic State has followed its own path in developing professional training for museum staff; however, a unifying factor across the region was a shared understanding of the critical importance of professionalism in the museum field.

Educational opportunities for museum professionals were offered by both universities and the non-governmental sector. Museums began to employ specialists with academic education relevant to the museum field; in the best cases, study programs included a course that provided a general understanding of the specifics of museum work. The educational offerings of museum associations and other non-governmental organizations primarily focused on the practical aspects of museum work. Questions concerning the fundamental nature of museum work were addressed only fragmentarily. The format of the Brno Summer School of Museology seemed to be a great example of how to focus on theoretical aspects of museum work and promote awareness that understanding the meaning of museum, or the questions that start with WHY, are as important as practical skills.

The Latvian State Authority on Museums, the institution responsible for implementing cultural policy in the museum sector in Latvia, reached out to colleagues in Estonia and Lithuania. All parties agreed to initiate a collaborative project aimed at enhancing theoretical knowledge, providing such an opportunity to a broad range of museum professionals in the most effective way possible. Our shared experience at Brno ensured mutual understanding and a productive dialogue.

BMS structure and topics covered

The goal of the BMS is “to develop and strengthen museological thinking in the Baltic States by connecting theory with practice, so that Baltic museums become more professional, contemporary, and accessible to society” (About the Baltic Museology School, n.d.). We aim to encourage museum professionals to think critically and to apply the international museological insights independently.

The project is part of the Baltic States’ Ministries of Culture cooperation program. The ministries fund full or partial participation fees for their respective national participants.

Every summer, a week-long seminar is held in one of the Baltic countries. 2025 was the 21st BMS session. The only time when the event was skipped was in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the heart of the project are internationally recognized lecturers who share their expertise with museum professionals from the Baltics. Over the years, BMS has welcomed more than 30 guest lecturers. A special place in the School’s history belongs to the charismatic American museologist Stephen E. Weil, who in 2004 was the first to share his knowledge. Several lecturers – François Mairesse, Peter van Mensch, Martin Schaerer, Leontine Meijer van Mensch, and Diana Walters – have participated multiple times, becoming co-creators of the BMS experience.

The choice of topic is determined by the actualities and developments of the Baltic museums. The overall direction of BMS content is well illustrated by the theme of the very first session: “Museums and their Role in the Contemporary World.” Viewing the museum as a dynamic social phenomenon that evolves along with societal changes, the BMS has sought to reflect various aspects of contemporary museum practice:

- Interest in the museum’s responsibility towards society has been dominant;
- Five BMS sessions have been devoted to the analysis of the social role of museums;
- Various aspects of museum management have also been discussed in multiple sessions;
- Topics related to museum collections and heritage have consistently attracted interest;
- Several sessions have been dedicated to museum communication, as well as exhibitions as the main form of communication;
- As a response to current developments in the museum field, the BMS has also focused on topics related to Intangible Heritage, Museum Ethics, Information Management, Difficult Heritage, Sustainability in Museum Practice.

BMS teaching methods include both academic lectures and group work. A key component of the learning process is visiting nearby museums, which are analyzed in relation to the thematic focus of each session.

BMS organizers encourage participants to delve into the chosen topic in advance. This is where museological literature recommended by the lecturers, which participants read before the training session, comes in handy. The working language of the BMS is English. To address language barriers, museological texts are translated into Latvian and made available both electronically on the BMS website and in printed anthologies published every five years.

Since 2018, a conference related to the topic has been held on one of the days of the BMS session, in which both school members and a wider circle of audience are invited. Sometimes the conference is live streamed on social media, allowing remote participation.

The BMS project has an official website that provides information about the current year’s activities as well as an archive documenting previous sessions.



Figure 1: Baltic Museology School, 2023. © The Promotional Society of Museology in the Baltics.

The role of the BMS in continuing education for museum professionals

The target audience of the BMS is museum professionals. Participants come with varying levels of experience. When defining the selection criteria for participation, a key requirement is clear motivation and a desire to engage deeply in the chosen topic.

The BMS is one of several continuing education opportunities available to museum professionals. Unlike most programs that focus primarily on the practical aspects of museum work, the BMS emphasizes the importance of a theoretical grounding – museology – in fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the museum’s unique role. BMS is an attempt to bridge theory and practice, which is not always an easy task. However, the organizers believe it is essential not to lose focus on the fundamental question: What is the purpose of each museum activity? Why is it essential for achieving the museum’s goals and implementing its mission?

The latest BMS session concluded in June 2025 with the theme “Museum Accessibility and Audience Development.” Summarizing the lessons learned, Una Sedleniece, Chair of the Board of the Society of Promotion of Museology in the Baltics, noted:

One of the most important insights of the participants was the understanding that accessibility is not merely a technical or financial issue – it is an expression of values and attitudes. [...] The session emphasized that there is no such thing as “special” needs – there are simply human needs that can become relevant to any of us at different stages of life. Therefore, accessibility and inclusive practices must be at the core of museum operations – they apply not only to visitors but also to the staff. By ceasing to exclude some, we create an opportunity to include many. The beneficiary of inclusive practices is not only the museum and its visitors but the entire society. (Sedleniece, 2025)

This insight confirms that even in such a practical area as museum accessibility, the BMS has once again succeeded in achieving a synthesis of theory and practice – thus fulfilling its mission to inspire museum professionals to critically evaluate and improve their daily work.

The BMS has proven itself as a sustainable platform for professional collaboration. The collaboration model established by the BMS, which respects the choices, needs, and traditions of each partner, has

become a guarantee of stability and sustainability. The BMS serves as an example of how to build cross-border institutional partnerships. Each annual session brings together 10 participants from each country, forming a group of 30–35 museum professionals. Over the years, more than 500 museum employees have taken part in BMS, many of them more than once.

By providing the opportunity to meet authorities and opinion leaders in the museum field, the BMS stimulates interest and desire to learn about the essence of museum work and encourages evaluation of one's daily work in an international context. The range of guest lecturers has been impressive and includes leaders from ICOFOM and other ICOM International Committees. The international dimension of the BMS is also given by the venue in a neighboring country, allowing for comparison and analysis of similarities and differences. BMS strengthens collegial ties and promotes information exchange among museums and governing institutions in the Baltic region. In today's rapidly changing world, informal networks and swift information exchange are not only a source of stability but also a factor of resilience.

Why does it seem important to reflect on the BMS experience and highlight this project, especially with future challenges in mind? The BMS assessment allows us to draw conclusions that could inspire colleagues across the global museum community to reflect on the place and role of museology in professional continuing education:

1. The sustained interest of Baltic museum professionals in museological topics for over 20 years confirms the hypothesis that full professional competence requires regular opportunities to deepen museological knowledge – opportunities that the BMS provides. Skillful integration of theory (museology) and practice (museography) is a key factor for participant engagement and the project's sustainability.
2. A continuing education program designed as an international project can provide added value: beyond the annual sessions, it has the potential to expand and diversify forms of international cooperation among organizers, coordinators, and participants. Participants could strengthen the links established during the BMS by initiating joint inter-institutional projects. Although the BMS has already realized some of this potential, there is room for further development.
3. The value of the project would be significantly enhanced by closer cooperation with ICOM International committees, especially ICOFOM. Perhaps the BMS could serve as a platform for promoting and testing ideas and insights relevant to ICOFOM within the Baltic region. This would also help attract knowledgeable and engaged guest lecturers. The establishment of a Scientific Council could strengthen the quality of the School by overseeing strategic planning.
4. The long-term and international nature of the project requires more modern and active communication channels. This would help disseminate the insights gained through BMS, provide a platform for ongoing exchange of ideas, and raise the profile of the BMS both within the professional community and within the wider public.

We hope that the experience of the Baltic States will serve as an inspiration to our colleagues in the diverse and vibrant global museum community.

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Trauma site museums and collection donors: Practice and reflection based on the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum in China

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The 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum is the largest and highest-level earthquake-themed memorial museum in China, with a collection that includes over 60,000 items in various categories, such as physical objects, pictures, documents, and artworks. These collections are largely acquired through social donations, targeted solicitation, and transfers from other institutions. Social donations account for a relatively high proportion and come from earthquake survivors, bereaved families, official rescue teams, and non-official volunteers. Some of these donated objects are now on display. Current research on disaster or trauma site museums frequently focuses on the construction of collective memory or the experiences and perceptions of ordinary visitors, with only a small portion of studies involving the interplay between the collection process and the source communities. This paper takes the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum as a case study, focusing on the relationship between the donated collections and the contributors. Through field surveys and in-depth interviews, this research explores the following questions: What is the accession process of these collections? What does it mean for these trauma-affected groups to donate their objects to the museum, to have them collected and displayed?

Within the global museum landscape, trauma site museums constitute a distinctive presence often categorized as “dark heritage” (Biran et al., 2011; Han, 2024) or “difficult heritage” (Lehrer et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2015). In this study, trauma site museums refer to institutions established at locations where traumatic events occurred, encompassing both natural and human-made disasters. Considerable scholarly attention has focused on public motivations for visiting and experiences within such museums. Primary reasons for people visiting places of death and suffering are satisfying curiosity, learning about the past, and commemorating the past (Light, 2017; Miles, 2019; Iliev, 2021). Compared to other museum types, trauma site museums elicit stronger emotional responses among visitors. Many consider these experiences to generate positive outcomes, including facilitating recovery or reconciliation (particularly in war-related museums), disseminating knowledge, improving well-being, strengthening social cohesion, promoting tourism, and stimulating economic development (Sodaro, 2018; Rico, 2020; Willard et al., 2022). While research on trauma site museums has proliferated, existing studies predominantly focus on the public, with limited examination of their relationships with stakeholders, particularly trauma-affected communities.

Background

5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum

At 14:28:04 Beijing Time on May 12, 2008, an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale struck Sichuan Province, China. The disaster resulted in 87,150 fatalities, 374,643 injuries, and direct economic losses amounting to 852.309 billion yuan. It also triggered various secondary disasters, including landslides, rockfalls, and debris flows. As the epicenter was in Wenchuan County, Sichuan, the event became known as the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake. This earthquake stands as the most destructive, the most widespread in its impact, and the most challenging for rescue and relief efforts since the founding of the People's Republic of China. In September of the same year following the earthquake, the State Council of the People's Republic of China approved plans to construct an earthquake memorial museum. Beichuan County, the area suffering the most severe devastation, was chosen as the site for the museum. Named the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum, the complex primarily consists of two major components: the museum and the earthquake relic site. The exterior facade of the museum's building is shaped like a crack (Figure 1), which symbolizes "freezing the moment of disaster like a flash of lightning between the earth, leaving an eternal memory for future generations." The exhibition consists mainly of two parts: indoor and outdoor. The indoor exhibition area is further divided into two sections – one records the entire process of the disaster, rescue, and reconstruction, while the other is dedicated to popularizing scientific knowledge about earthquakes. The earthquake relic site preserves various collapsed buildings, rescue scenes, and secondary geological hazards triggered by the quake. It stands as the world's largest comprehensively protected earthquake disaster zone, featuring the most complete range of destruction types and most representative secondary disasters, preserved entirely on-site in their original state.



Figure 1: Exterior façade. Photo by Lie Ren, 2013, © 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum.

Donation process

The 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum primarily acquires its collection through fieldwork and public donations. Right after the earthquake, museum and heritage experts from Sichuan Province hurried to the disaster zone to document and recover artifacts. They collected structural fragments, victims' personal belongings, educational materials from damaged schools, and archival records. These

objects were initially preserved at the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and several other museums in Sichuan. They were later transferred to the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum upon its completion. Since 2008, donations have been an ongoing source of acquisitions. Museum staff actively reach out to potential donors to request contributions, and public calls for artifacts are also periodically issued. Most donations are received in person, with fewer sent by mail. Cataloging follows traditional methods, recording essential details like object names, dimensions, and classifications. Selected donated artifacts are displayed in permanent exhibitions, while others are kept in storage.

Methods

The research team began by systematically screening artifacts donated to the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum by people who had experienced the earthquake. Emphasis was placed on selecting objects with high typicality. Subsequently, the team contacted each donor to secure informed consent for interviews. Through preliminary communication, nine participants have been confirmed for in-depth interviews. This study received ethics approval from the Ethics Committee of Shanghai University, ensuring compliance with academic ethical standards.

Prior to the formal interviews, the research team compiled background information on each interviewee, including details about their donated objects and associated contexts. This informed the development of tailored interview protocols. Question design strictly adhered to ethical guidelines, avoiding content that could potentially cause re-traumatization. Participants were informed of their right to terminate the interview at any point, fully respecting their autonomy. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit prior consent. Commencing in April 2025, interviews are currently ongoing, with individual sessions lasting between 30 and 80 minutes. Discussions centered on key themes: personal earthquake experiences, motivations and processes behind donation decisions, the personal significance of donating, and related psychological needs.

Donated items and stories were collected from selected interviewees. Interviewee 1 donated a wooden stool used by her son during his lifetime, which is currently on display in the museum's indoor exhibition hall. Her son was attending class at school when the earthquake struck and unfortunately lost his life. This stool was an important companion in the child's daily study and life. Interviewee 3, who was successfully rescued after being trapped in the rubble for 135 hours during the earthquake, donated a letter of gratitude he wrote to the rescue team. Interviewee 6 donated the electric tricycle and personal belongings he used during his volunteer rescue efforts. The electric tricycle is displayed in the outdoor exhibition area, while the personal items are exhibited indoors. A farmer by occupation, he spontaneously formed a volunteer rescue team with relatives and friends following the Wenchuan earthquake. They journeyed over 2,000 kilometers on the tricycle to reach the disaster zone, a group later dubbed the "Most Remarkable Rescue Team" by the public. Interviewee 9, a member of an official rescue team, donated his diary, which is currently preserved in the museum's repository. The diary documents his experiences and inner journey during the rescue operations.

Preliminary findings

The current research is still underway, so only some preliminary conclusions have been drawn. First, objects serve as witnesses to the personal experiences of trauma-affected groups, which is the primary reason for their preservation: *People asked if I would throw away this car I'd kept for so many years. I said I would keep it forever, so I could look at it when I'm old* (Interviewee 7). *At the time, I just kept (the diary) after writing it, preserving it as a personal memory* (Interviewee 9).

When these objects are connected to relatives, friends, or comrades who shared the earthquake experience, they become tangible connections to those people and serve as emotional anchors: *When I miss my son, I can just look at it* (Interviewee 1).

What does it mean for these trauma-affected groups to donate their objects to the museum, to have them collected and displayed? The significance of the museum and heritage site encompasses three main themes: a repository of objects, a memorial space, and a provider of a sense of recognition.

Participants universally regarded museums as more professionally equipped than themselves for object preservation, viewing these institutions as secure repositories for their belongings. With the exception of one donor who had not visited the 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake Museum, all others who had visited the museum and heritage site deliberately sought out their donated items and closely examined their preservation conditions: *It used to be displayed outdoors, but it was well preserved. Now it's under a shelter, so it's even better protected* (Interviewee 5). *I've asked the museum staff several times when it will be exhibited – I wanted to see it. But I still haven't received any notification* (Interviewee 8). Interviewee 1 donated a wooden stool used by her son, who lost his life in the earthquake. She later worked at the memorial museum, where she would wipe this stool whenever passing by.

Second, interviewees widely emphasized the commemorative role of the museum and heritage site, seeing them as ritual spaces for mourning the deceased and remembering the disaster.

Finally, the museum's collection and display of respondents' personal belongings gave them a sense of being seen, needed, and recognized: At the time, I wondered if my diary could be considered an artifact. It seemed somewhat trivial – perhaps no one would value it. I hesitated about donating it (Interviewee 4). I never imagined my objects would be displayed. I found it profoundly meaningful (Interviewee 3).

Therefore, these preliminary findings partially reveal the significance of trauma site museum collections for trauma-affected groups. While previous research has predominantly focused on the impact of exhibitions and education programs on the general public, studies addressing the intrinsic relationship between collections and specific communities remain scarce. This research hopes to provide some clues for further study.

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Role of museum curators in the community: Focusing on regional festivals in Japan

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Recently, a growing demand for museums to incorporate diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) into their practices has been observed. In this presentation, we will examine the relationship between museums and local festivals in Japan by referring to the perspectives of the curators involved in the preservation, research, exhibition, and promotion of museum materials. Then, using museum materials, we will discuss the activities of the local museums that are putting the DEAI into practice.

Japanese museums and exhibits in local community-based festivals

At present, there are around 5,800 museums in Japan (*About Museum*, n.d.), thereby ranking second in the world after the United States. A pertinent question is why is the number of museums in Japan so high? This phenomenon can be attributed to Japan's rapid economic growth from 1955 to 1973, when many regional museums were established. In Japan, the local governments often establish museums as part of the regional development efforts. These museums serve as educational institutions that introduce the history and culture of the local community, thereby strengthening the regional identity.

While regional museums have various features, typical comprehensive regional museums usually feature exhibition rooms dedicated to themes, such as tracing the region's history from prehistoric times to the present, showcasing the diversity of its natural features, and introducing the regional industries. This presentation focuses on two mid-sized comprehensive municipal museums that are typical examples of regional museums. The Nagoya City Museum (population 2,330,000), in the regional center of Central Japan, and the Kariya City Museum (population 150,000) in Aichi Prefecture have attempted to link their historical exhibits to the local festivals. Aichi Prefecture is one of the leading regions in Japan for festival floats and has the largest number of museums displaying festival floats (Kito, 2007).

The festivals held across Japan have played a key role in forming the local communities by encouraging intergenerational exchanges through the participation of the local residents in preparation for festivals throughout the year. However, these festivals are facing several challenges. In addition to a shortage of individuals organizing the festivals due to population decline and aging, the traditions are mostly passed down orally, leaving no written records. A survey conducted in 2016 before the COVID-19 pandemic reported that around 60 traditional events designated as intangible folk cultural properties had been suspended or abolished in 20 prefectures (Mukei, 2017). The museums in the Aichi Prefecture have been making considerable efforts to address these issues.

First, we will discuss the relatively new Kariya City Museum of History, which opened in 2019. In addition to the basic functions of a museum, such as research, collection, preservation, exhibitions, and education, the museum's management policy includes the preservation and transmission of festivals, archival functions, and the preservation and use of buried cultural properties (Kariyashi, 2024). As part of its festival preservation and information dissemination function, the museum's Festival Plaza preserves and exhibits the Kariya City-designated tangible folk cultural properties, such as festival floats, in an appropriate environment. It also provides opportunities for individuals to experience the Manto Festival, an Aichi Prefecture-designated intangible folk cultural property, through activities such as illuminating lanterns. While the festival is mainly preserved by the local groups, the museum provides support for preservation and restoration as required. Since the festival is an essential part of the local culture, the museum records the designated cultural properties and disseminates information to the citizens and visitors. Although there is a shortage of curators who can conduct research on the preservation of the festival culture, the museum is considering requesting scholars to conduct research as necessary. Additionally, to address the lack of festival records that have been passed down in the community, the museum collects information on the festival dates and photographs of events such that the materials can be used in future city history compilations. Approximately 10 museums in Aichi Prefecture preserve and display the floats used in the festivals, provide explanations, and support the local festivals.

Recreation of the Okuwa Festival by Nagoya City Museum

Another example is the Nagoya City Museum. The museum collaborates with the local community to organize the Okuwa Festival, which takes place once every 60 years, and has continued to organize various types of festivals with the community (Muto, 2002; 2008). The Okuwa Festival is held every 60 years in several places in Central Japan to pray for a bountiful rice harvest. The last festival was held in 1947, and its 60th anniversary was in 2007. However, with the decline in agriculture, the festival, which was closely tied to farming activities, could no longer be continued. In addition, with the loss of information from the historical documents, it became difficult to organize the festival as a traditional event.

The Nagoya City Museum houses the Okuwa Matsuri Shinkei Zuryaku [Scene of Okuwa Festival] written by Kōriki Enkōan (1756–1831), a feudal retainer of the Owari clan (now Aichi prefecture), and has republished a catalogue along with illustrations. Based on the descriptions of the 1827 Okuwa Festival depicted by Enkōan, they have decided to organize an event to revive the festival. The Scene of Okuwa Festival provides detailed descriptions of the dances, costumes, and floats that appeared in the 1827 Okuwa Festival parade, and we attempted to recreate the parade based on this book. However, since it was not feasible to recreate all the aspects of the parade at the museum, we decided to collaborate with the local community to involve as many people as possible. The two shopping districts that participated were the Mizuho-dori Shopping District, which is the museum's local area, and the Ōsu Shopping District, which was also the site of the 1827 Okuwa Festival. Mizuho aims to revitalize the area with the museum as a landmark while Ōsu aims to not only revitalize the town but also revive the festival tradition that had been lost for 180 years. In preparation for the event, study sessions using the museum's Scene of Okuwa Festival to learn about its history were held. After learning that the floats and costumes of the Okuwa Festival around 180 years ago were based on the trends of the time, they discussed how to recreate them in the present day and then proceeded with the design and preparation.



Figure 1: A whale and an octopus in front of the museum. © Nagoya City Museum.

The event took place in September 2007 with the participants holding a parade through the museum garden and the street in front of it. The local residents gathered at the museum's truck yard to create papier-mâché *Maneki-neko* [lucky cats] and a large portable shrine based on a festival float. Additionally, in the Ōsu Shopping District, the shops closed for the night, and the participants sewed together large whales and giant octopuses made of papier-mâché in the arcade, completing them over approximately two months. On the day of the festival, the participants paraded through the neighborhood, and the event culminated in a grand dance in the museum garden. People from other regions planning to hold their own Okuwa Festivals also visited to observe the event, and consequently, similar parades featuring floats, costumes, and dances began to be held at Okuwa Festivals in western Aichi Prefecture. Furthermore, inspired by the success of the museum event, the Ōsu Shopping District decided to hold its own festival, which was organized in October with a procession through the shopping district that created a lively ambience in the area.

The Okuwa Festival, a collaboration between the museum and the local shopping district, was realized by using the museum's collection, *Scene of Okuwa Festival* as a cultural resource. The floats created through this collaboration provided valuable information for preserving the festival. Owing to the durability of the materials, the structures were not permanent museum artifacts but were rather treated as references. However, they were displayed in the permanent exhibition as valuable resources for conveying information about the Okuwa Festival to visitors. This is an example of the museum's function of preserving the local materials that are being fully used, collaborating with the community to revive a traditional festival, and then explaining the festival's heritage in the exhibition room with the active participation of the residents in shaping the narrative presented by the museum.

Since then, the museum and Ōsu Shopping Street have organized various historical events in Ōsu, which are not limited to the Okuwa Festival. These include a camel parade commemorating the camel show and a recreation of the centipede parade held 190 years and 220 years ago, respectively. These events are often organized on anniversary dates, taking advantage of Ōsu's characteristic as a bustling entertainment district since the Edo period (1603–1867), known for its theater and street performances. Furthermore, the museum's collections, such as those from Enkōan, are used as resources and are displayed at the museum after the events. Regional collaboration events, such as the Okuwa Festival, are examples of how the museum materials have taken root in the community and how museums are recognized as necessary for community development and building a better future.

These two museums have highlighted the relationship between museums and festivals. Traditionally, festivals that have been passed down in each region have seen their methods of transmission reevaluat-

ed, and it has become important for festivals to not only inherit the established formats but also flexibly adapt to the times. Museums play a key role in this process.

Collaboration between the museums and the local communities

The Japanese Museum Law, enacted in 1951, was originally established under the Social Education Law and thus had a strong educational focus. However, with the enforcement of the Law Amending Part of the Museum Law in 2023, museums were designated as facilities based on not only the Social Education Law but also the Basic Law for Culture and the Arts and are now required to function as facilities that combine the roles of both social education and cultural facilities. At present, museums are expected to contribute to the revitalization of their communities by collaborating with various local entities to enhance their vitality. Museums are expected to address the various local and social issues through collaboration and cooperation, thereby contributing to the revitalization of the local communities. These expectations are consistent with the museum definition adopted by ICOM in 2022 and the recent DEAI initiatives.

Japanese museums have historically played a key role in collaborating with the local communities and have a dual significance as museums created through the participation of the locals. In preserving the festivals in the region, which are both tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites, it is important for curators to actively engage with the community and work together to create something new. Substantial efforts must be taken to secure human resources and create a suitable environment in which museums can function as the core of the community. Curators must possess both a comprehensive and macro-level perspective gained through museum studies and a specialized perspective in fields, such as folklore studies, history, and art history that emphasize the importance of the tangible and intangible cultural assets rooted in the community. Therefore, curators are responsible for applying community-oriented perspectives to each academic field.

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Fostering a transdisciplinary, inclusive, and resilient museum community for a sustainable future

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In the 21st century, museums across the globe are grappling with a profound crisis of purpose and relevance. This paper argues that for these institutions to build a sustainable future, especially in post-colonial nations like India, the very concept of “Building Sector Capacity” must be radically redefined. Traditionally focused on the professional development of internal staff, a truly resilient model must broaden its scope to empower the entire community as capable and informed stakeholders. This requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of museum education – viewing it not merely as education *in* a museum, but as education *about* the museum as a functional, social, and political institution. This paper puts forward a three-pillared framework to achieve this, using the practical case of a proposed “Panchayat Museum” – a museum rooted in India’s village-level self-governments – as a powerful model for turning decolonial theory into practice. By proposing a framework that deconstructs the colonial museum model and reconstructs it from the grassroots up, we can create a sustainable ecosystem where institutions and communities develop their capacities in tandem.

Pillar 1: Decolonising museum function, purpose, and culture

The foundational problem that necessitates this new framework is the colonial architecture of the museum model itself. Even decades after independence, many museums in the Global South “still operate in a colonial shell” (Chitima, 2021, p. 73). This colonial ethos manifests in the very function and purpose of the institution. It positions the museum as a top-down “position of authority,” engaging in what Lynn Maranda terms “subtle colonialism” by clinging to “rights of intrusion and ownership” over community heritage (Maranda, 2021, p. 180). To break free from this shell, a process of decolonisation must be undertaken, not as a historical event, but as an ongoing commitment to transform the internal culture of museums and the behaviour of their staff.

A prime example of this colonial function in India is the treatment of Indigenous art. The colonial administration created an artificial distinction between “fine art” and “craft,” a classification designed to devalue the functional and sacred nature of community-based traditions. As Anushka Roy Bardhan (2025) explains, Indian folk art was never meant to be a purely aesthetic object “frozen in time.” Instead, it functions as part of an “entire ecosystem of knowledge and meaning,” deeply embedded in daily ritual and life. The act of placing these objects in a museum, framed as static artefacts, strips them of their living context and spiritual power. Decolonising museum practice, therefore, requires dismantling this false hierarchy and recognising these traditions for the complex systems of knowledge they represent (Roy Bardhan, 2025).

This transformation begins by challenging the museum’s role as a passive repository and reimagining its function. A decolonised purpose requires a fundamental shift in power. As Aboriginal curator Élisabeth Kaine powerfully argues, genuine collaboration is meaningless if it does not grant communities control over “the content, the aesthetics ... the choice of mediums through which it is expressed, or the choice of objects” (Kaine, 2021, p. 116). For true empowerment, “the control must be over both the

message and its expression” (Kaine, 2021, p. 116). This directly impacts staff behaviour, demanding that curators and educators move from being authoritative experts to becoming facilitators of community narratives. A practical strategy for this functional shift is to reconceptualise the museum as a site of “cultural translation” (Phillips, 2021, p. 196). Instead of assimilating objects and stories into a dominant, often Western, narrative, this approach seeks to preserve the unique context of a culture. It involves providing “thick translation” – rich cultural and linguistic context – that allows for the celebration of cultural difference and even untranslatability (Phillips, 2021, p. 196). This changes the museum’s purpose from one of classification and display to one of dialogue and understanding. Ultimately, this pillar calls for what Bruno Brulon Soares describes as a commitment to “decolonise the mind” and fundamentally “transform the culture of museums in order to denounce the historical violence produced by these institutions” (Brulon Soares, 2021, p. 233).

Pillar 2: Integrating community-centric initiatives

This pillar provides the practical methodology for achieving the cultural transformation outlined above. It redefines “capacity development” by expanding it beyond staff to include the entire community, turning passive audiences into active co-creators. A commitment to community engagement cannot be a peripheral programme; it must be the core operational principle of the decolonised museum. This requires empowering staff with a lens of equity and inclusion and may involve hiring community curators who can act as authentic bridges between the institution and its public (Merritt, 2018).

Practical applications of this principle have yielded powerful results in the Indian context. The Muziris Children’s Science Gallery in Kerala, a project I was involved in designing, for instance, prioritised hands-on, interactive learning with tools like 3D-printed science toys to create an engaging, non-hierarchical educational space that resonated with local youth. By doing so, it moved away from the authoritative expert model and toward a function of facilitated discovery. Similarly, the Reimagining Museum Spaces project, a curriculum I was involved in developing with the PAMA Transdisciplinary Non-Profit Research Collective, served as a pilot for a new training model designed to nurture emerging professionals equipped to build these community connections from the ground up. This approach directly responds to the need for a paradigm shift where the community can “demand participation in the museum’s activities and even in its management, not the other way around” (Ferreira, 2021, p. 136). This pillar, therefore, envisions the museum as a dynamic entity that strengthens grassroots democracy through shared ownership and dismantles the very idea of the museum as an aloof institution.

Pillar 3: Embedding museum education into holistic school curricula

The third pillar is where the framework’s ultimate goal – creating a society that understands and values its cultural institutions – is realised. It is built on the tenet that museum education must also be education about the museum. A long-term vision for sustainability requires fostering a new generation that sees museums as essential community assets. This is, in fact, a two-way process: by deeply integrating museum resources with school curricula, we not only enhance classroom learning but also educate children about the fundamental role of museums in society. This approach prepares them to become responsible citizens who value, support, and actively help evolve these critical social institutions.

This is not merely an idealistic goal but one strongly supported by the Indian Constitution. The 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 granted formal constitutional status to Panchayats, grounding these institutions of self-government in national law. Specifically, Article 243G of the Constitution empowers these local bodies with authority over 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule, including “primary and secondary schools,” “technical training and vocational education,” “adult and non-formal education,” “libraries,” and “cultural activities” (The Constitution of India, 1950, Art. 243G). A powerful model that leverages this mandate is the Panchayat Museum, a concept this author has previously proposed (Kumar, 2025). This model envisions an Integrated Museum Complex at the village level, a hub that would

connect these disparate constitutional responsibilities. This complex would feature galleries on local history and art alongside a Fun Science Gallery and outdoor science parks. This is particularly vital given that India's formal education system often limits science education to the rote memorisation of facts, failing to cultivate a culture of scientific inquiry and critical thinking. A non-formal institution like a Panchayat science centre offers the flexibility to engage with the public, interact with local belief systems, and create spaces where people can co-create knowledge. By creating a space where the local school is deeply interconnected with the museum, we allow the museum to become a valuable teaching aid that enhances classroom learning, moving beyond idealistic visions to achievable, policy-supported goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the path toward a sustainable future for museums in postcolonial nations requires a courageous and structural break from the past. This paper has argued that this transformation hinges on re-defining "capacity development" as a holistic, democratic project that empowers the entire community, and reframing museum education as a vital tool for teaching citizens *about* their cultural institutions. The decolonial imperative demands a change in the very function, purpose, and culture of museums – moving them from static positions of authority to dynamic sites of cultural translation and shared power. The framework proposed here, with its pillars of decolonised functions, community-centric initiatives, and deep educational integration through models like the Panchayat Museum, offers a practical blueprint for this vision. This approach creates a truly resilient ecosystem where the community is equipped to support its museum, and the museum is built to serve its community. It is a call to action to finally move beyond the colonial shell and realise the museum's full potential as a living institution that is truly of, by, and for the people.

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Les enjeux d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion de la postmigration au Canada

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Au cours de la dernière décennie, les musées d'art canadiens ont affirmé leur engagement social en intégrant les questions d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion (ÉDI) dans leur gestion des collections. Les politiques d'ÉDI favorisent la représentation de la diversité qui reflète la société canadienne. L'évolution du discours sur la diversité s'accompagne d'un renouvellement des politiques et des pratiques. Elle provoque une remise en question de la représentation des minorités au sein des collections, une révision du discours sur les objets et de la terminologie utilisée dans leur documentation afin de remédier aux inégalités et d'intégrer les identités plurielles. Ces différentes pratiques reflètent le tournant réparateur en muséologie (Sterling & Larkin, 2021 ; Guzin Lukic, 2025). Notre recherche se concentre spécifiquement sur les minorités issues de l'immigration ou la postmigration. Ce concept aborde les contextes sociaux et culturels liés à la mobilité et à la diversité, et introduit une nouvelle épistémologie pour appréhender cette réalité complexe (Peterson, Schramm & Wiegand, 2019). Il est ici fait référence aux artistes issus de ces milieux, sous-représentés dans les musées, qui traitent de thèmes liés à la migration tels que les identités plurielles, l'appartenance, le déplacement et l'hybridation. Cet article soulève deux questions : comment les changements du discours dans les politiques de collection reflètent-ils ces nouvelles réalités postmigratoires au sein des deux musées d'art nationaux du Canada et du Québec ? Quelles pratiques réparatrices et collaboratives ont été mises en œuvre ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, nous examinerons le discours présent dans la documentation et la représentativité des collections. Le premier éclaire les politiques en matière d'ÉDI, et le second, la manière dont ces institutions abordent les identités plurielles qui transcendent les catégories traditionnelles de classification muséale. L'analyse des politiques muséales, des rapports annuels, des plans stratégiques, des bases de données des collections et des dossiers des artistes démontre comment l'inclusion des groupes sous-représentés a évolué au cours des dix dernières années. Enfin, cet article examine les nouvelles pratiques de collection motivées par les enjeux de l'ÉDI à la Galerie nationale du Canada et au Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

Les enjeux d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion (ÉDI)

L'évolution des politiques d'ÉDI dans les musées d'art au Canada est un mouvement récent d'engagement contre la discrimination, le racisme, l'exclusion et la transformation de cette institution héritière d'un passé colonial. Les politiques de diversité au Canada s'inspirent de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés ainsi que de la politique de multiculturalisme mise en œuvre dans les années 1970. Au cours des années 1990, plusieurs initiatives ont été mises en place afin de soutenir les groupes marginalisés, notamment les Autochtones et les minorités visibles. Cependant, les politiques de l'ÉDI ont gagné en importance ces dernières années, à travers les initiatives de recherche dans le secteur public. La politique d'ÉDI en matière de recherche au Canada (Comité de la coordination, 2018) s'est répandue au sein des universités et des institutions muséales. Ces trois concepts sont les catégories normatives pour les institutions culturelles permettant de guider l'action selon les notions éthiques (Beauchemin, Mailhien & Duguay, 2020). Selon le contexte historique, culturel et social de chaque institution, ces valeurs

sont complétées par l'accessibilité, la justice, la décolonisation et l'écoresponsabilité. L'instauration des mesures spécifiques vise à assurer la représentativité de la diversité au sein des collections et des expositions. Ces mesures se veulent systémiques et transversales. Depuis les années 2020, plusieurs musées ont adopté des stratégies concrètes pour promouvoir l'ÉDI et lutter contre la discrimination systémique en créant le nouveau poste ÉDI comme le Musée canadien pour les droits de personnes à Winnipeg en 2021. D'ailleurs, ce mouvement a mobilisé les musées, les associations muséales et les instances gouvernementales. L'Association des musées canadiens (Kamat, 2023) a mené un projet de recherche sur la diversité au travail et pour élaborer une stratégie nationale visant à consolider les pratiques ÉDI (2025). Ces initiatives illustrent l'importance accordée à ces enjeux. Les musées d'art ont contribué à exclure, marginaliser, à invisibiliser des peuples autochtones et des minorités issues de la migration entre autres. Le mouvement d'ÉDI a contribué aux transformations des musées d'art qui assument davantage leur rôle social. Bien que les changements concrets et systémiques soient lents (Dawson, 2022) et malgré la difficulté de se rapprocher de l'égalité (Daymond, 2019, p.171), le changement de discours est indéniable. Notre étude sur l'influence des politiques d'ÉDI sur les processus d'acquisition et de documentation au sein des musées d'art menée entre 2023 et 2024 a démontré ces transformations.

L'analyse couvre la période d'une dizaine d'années des politiques de gestion des collections, des plans stratégiques et des rapports annuels ainsi que les recherches effectuées dans les bases de données des collections en ligne (Guzin Lukic, 2025). Une politique de gestion des collections agit comme un document de référence pour le personnel du musée. Elle représente aussi l'engagement pris par le musée envers les citoyens et les organismes qui financent le musée (Bergeron, 2022). La plupart des politiques analysées datent de 2017 ou 2018 et nécessitent une mise à jour. Dans le cadre du renouvellement de la politique muséale nationale, le ministère du Patrimoine canadien a lancé en 2022-23 une vaste consultation à laquelle ont participé plus de 3 000 personnes à travers le Canada (Canadian Heritage, n.d.). L'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion sont ressorties comme les enjeux majeurs avec la durabilité, la préservation, l'accès et la gestion des collections, et la réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones. Les résultats ont corroboré ces préoccupations dans la documentation des musées, les plans stratégiques, ou les rapports annuels que nous avons consultés. D'ailleurs, l'évolution rapide des enjeux ÉDI est ressortie clairement dans les politiques de collection et d'acquisition. Celles élaborées en 2017-18 intègrent de manière très limitée les postulats relatifs à l'ÉDI. En revanche, ces principes sont présents dans les documents publiés après 2020, tels que les plans stratégiques et les rapports annuels qui montrent aussi les actions concrètes des musées. Ainsi, le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada (MBAC) dans le rapport annuel 2022-2023 dévoile « Une analyse des lacunes dans les collections a été mise en branle afin d'examiner les éléments sous-représentés dans la collection d'œuvres d'art que nous gérons » (MBAC, 2023, p. 43). « Une nouvelle politique d'acquisition est en cours d'élaboration pour veiller à ce que les principes de JÉDI et A soient mis en application lorsque le Musée enrichit sa collection » (MBAC, 2025). Selon La politique d'acquisition (2018) « la priorité dans l'enrichissement de la collection nationale reste la diversité dans tous les sens du mot », de plus le Musée « s'efforcera tout spécialement d'acquérir des œuvres des artistes majeurs des régions d'origine des nouveaux Canadiens, tels l'Asie, le Moyen-Orient et l'Afrique » (MBAC, 2018, p. 3). Les acquisitions d'œuvres des nouveaux Canadiens ont été répertoriées en croisant les données issues de la recherche dans les rapports annuels et les dossiers d'artistes.

Dans la politique des collections du Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) « L'art des Premières Nations ou des diverses communautés culturelles établies au Québec et surtout l'apport de ces différents groupes dans le domaine de l'art contemporain, notamment autour des questions d'identité culturelle, est peu ou pas présent dans les collections. Le MNBAQ doit porter une attention particulière à ces différents axes de développement afin que la collection permanente puisse éventuellement en témoigner de manière significative » (MNBAQ, 2017, p. 8).

Les recherches sur la représentation de l'immigration portent principalement sur les musées d'histoire, d'ethnologie, de société ainsi que les musées d'immigration qui collectent les mémoires et les objets

du patrimoine des immigrants. Peu d'études ont été consacrées aux collections des musées d'art. L'invisibilisation des artistes immigrants dans les bases de données de ces collections a révélé des lacunes en matière de documentation.

Les défis et les initiatives de diversité et d'inclusion

Le système de classification des objets dans les musées, traditionnellement perçu comme un outil neutre de gestion de collection, fait l'objet de critiques pour son rôle dans la discrimination et l'exclusion, particulièrement en lien avec les enjeux de décolonisation (Turner, 2020). La diversité et les identités hybrides échappent aux systèmes de classification. Certaines institutions comme le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MAC) tentent de dépasser ces limites en adoptant des classifications plus flexibles. La base de données MAC Répertoire lancée en 2022 propose la catégorie « nationalité(s) » au pluriel, qui permet d'ajouter plusieurs nationalités pour identifier notamment les artistes transnationaux issus de l'immigration. Une autre stratégie consiste à utiliser les catégories d'objets culturels (Guzin Lukic, 2025).

La représentativité des postmigrants dans les collections muséales soulève la question de la manière dont ces institutions intègrent et interprètent leurs histoires, identités, contributions et expériences. Leur marginalisation est notable, à l'exception des musées de l'immigration créés à partir des années 1980 et 1990 (Gegê Leme, 2023). Ces musées abordent l'immigration comme une expérience personnelle en occultant parfois le contexte, les raisons de ces déplacements et la situation postmigratoire. Le concept de postmigration concerne les situations sociales et culturelles de mobilité et de diversité offrant ainsi une nouvelle épistémologie de ce phénomène complexe. Il fait référence aux artistes de ce groupe sous-représenté dans les musées qui traitent les thèmes en lien avec la migration comme les identités plurielles, transnationales, l'appartenance, le déplacement, l'hybridation, etc.

Conclusion

L'analyse des politiques muséales, des rapports annuels et des plans stratégiques a mis en évidence l'évolution de l'inclusion des groupes sous-représentés au sein des collections. La question de la représentativité de la diversité dans les collections des musées d'art est encouragée dans le contexte canadien qui favorise l'intégration des enjeux de l'ÉDI dans les musées. La remise en question du système de classification des artistes issus d'immigration met en lumière les lacunes de celui-ci face à la complexité des identités et des trajectoires transnationales, ainsi que la nécessité d'une révision pour promouvoir une représentation plurielle et plus inclusive. La critique des politiques et des pratiques d'ÉDI en tant que discours vide de sens caractérisé par une inclusion souvent superficielle pour démontrer l'engagement du musée soulève la nécessité d'explorer d'autres approches moins centrées sur l'identité. Les récentes recherches sur la migration en particulier la postmigration mettent l'accent sur les relations et les connexions plutôt que sur les perspectives identitaires. Cela s'inscrit dans la continuité des réflexions de la muséologie relationnelle, qui met en avant les interactions, ou encore les théories et les pratiques réparatrices. Cette pluralité des perspectives offre la possibilité de modifier le regard sur ce phénomène complexe au sein du musée.

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Status y peso del campo teórico de la museología en la formación de posgrados en museología en Latinoamérica

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Definidas como instancia académica de posgrado, ya sea de carácter terminal profesionalizante o preparatorias para los estudios doctorales y postdoctorales, las maestrías ofrecen la profundización teórica y conceptual en el ámbito del saber específico de las disciplinas que abordan.

En el caso de aquellas denominadas específicamente como Maestría en Museología, se infiere que los contenidos que se brindan conformarán el sesgo epistemológico de la teoría museológica como el núcleo científico distintivo y esencial en la formación académica del maestrando, cuyos emergentes, serán profesionales entrenados en la investigación, la comunicación del pensamiento, la reflexión crítica y el debate científico de la museología, entre otras habilidades y conocimientos que provee el dilatado y complejo universo del *métier*. Universo que, en primer lugar, requiere de la comprensión del Fenómeno Museológico en su interacción con las múltiples miradas devenidas de ideologías relacionadas con los procesos sociales, políticos y educativos sumados a las agencias de ética, integración, accesibilidad e inclusión -entre otras- que promueve la definición (ICOM, 2022).

Quizás el condicionamiento al logro de estas instancias de capacitación teórica superior, radica en que se desarrollan en el marco de una disciplina que arrastra aún un alto contenido del *quehacer* museológico entendido en la región tradicionalmente como museología y que, a juzgar por las evidencias, pareciera que sigue imponiéndose a la profundización teórica de la misma, observándose esto no sólo en los planes curriculares de las maestrías locales, sino también en otras latitudes y está relacionado a las diferentes acepciones de lo que es la disciplina.

El texto contiene un análisis del protagonismo de la Teoría Museológica en el universo de las maestrías denominadas específicamente en Museología dictadas en universidades de la región haciendo referencia a la densidad teórica que las mismas ofrecen en el concierto de las demás asignaturas en los Planes de Estudio y algunas cuestiones que de ello emergen observadas en el plano vincular entre la oferta de perfil del egresado que los institutos proponen, en las expectativas del ingresante y demás variables del contexto latinoamericano que condicionan el campo.

Durante las últimas décadas del siglo XX en América Latina, el incremento del acceso a la universidad y el impulso de reformas modernizadoras, favorecieron el surgimiento de una nueva profesionalización académica, las maestrías. Este proceso contribuyó a la multiplicación de programas de maestrías en diversas disciplinas, impulsando transformaciones que renovaron y dinamizaron el entorno universitario, alterando sus formas tradicionales de funcionamiento. En sentido lato, el término *magister* remite

etimológicamente a la persona más experta y competente en una materia, por lo tanto, en referente de la misma.

Consideradas desde el saber pedagógico, “la maestría capacita al profesional para liderar transformaciones significativas en su campo, sea mejorando sus habilidades docentes, gestionando instituciones o llevando a cabo investigaciones de alto impacto que contribuyan a la mejora continua del sistema social” (Didriksson, 2008).

Estas competencias adquiridas habilitan al graduado en el ejercicio profesional avanzado, debido a su entrenamiento y capacitación para la solución de problemáticas complejas de su campo de dominio. Por lo que, sostenemos que

las universidades deben transformarse a sí mismas para responder a las nuevas estructuras comunicacionales y construir bases de aprendizajes de alto valor social en los conocimientos desde una perspectiva interdisciplinaria y de investigación, basada en el contexto de su aplicación, sin dejar de mantener su visión crítica hacia la sociedad y su compromiso con el desarrollo humano y la sustentabilidad. (Sánchez Maríñez, 2008, pp. 327-341)

Según su propósito, las maestrías, se clasifican en profesionales y académicas.

Siguiendo esta tipología, los programas de maestría académica buscan profundizar conocimientos y habilidades en un área o disciplina, formando principalmente investigadores y docentes universitarios.

Esto implica el aprendizaje de metodologías y técnicas de investigación o creación propias de cada campo y la culminación en una tesis original. En cuanto a las maestrías profesionalizantes, se centran en la especialización práctica y el desarrollo de competencias en un ámbito profesional concreto. Sus estudiantes demuestran lo aprendido a través de un trabajo final aplicado (...) según las características del área elegida. (Brunner, 2021, pp. 269–280)

Los programas de maestría han contribuido a la diversificación institucional de los sistemas de educación superior, creando opciones más amplias para docentes y estudiantes para dar respuesta a demandas específicas del mercado laboral y la sociedad. Respecto al staff docente, las maestrías dieron lugar a un gran avance con la creación de las cátedras full-time, apetecidas por los profesores debido a la suba de categoría e ingresos. Para el alumnado latinoamericano, ofreció el vínculo con programas de intercambio y formación en el exterior de jóvenes becarios con sus seductoras perspectivas de acceso a otras realidades, que optimizaran capacitaciones y fortalecieran las capacidades regionales.

En lo referido a las estructuras universitarias de servicio, también demandó profundos cambios en espacios, equipamientos, laboratorios y en bibliotecas especializadas. En esa ola de producción de conocimiento teórico en las universidades con cursos superiores en Museología, la presencia de ICOM a través de ICOFOM, LAM, el Sub-Comité de Teoría Museológica de ICOFOM (denominado ICOFOM LAC a partir de 2020) se convirtió en un verdadero patrocinador honorario de divulgación teórica en la región. Destacaron en este proceso, dos visionarias académicas latinoamericanas, Nelly Decarolis y Tereza Scheiner, de Argentina y Brasil respectivamente, quienes fueron las creadoras en la región.

El fondo documental que ICOFOM LAC aporta continuamente a los centros de estudio, deviene de las publicaciones producidas en los Encuentros Internacionales del Subcomité, fruto de los debates y recomendaciones teóricas logradas en varias décadas de trabajo. Como festejo de los treinta años de vida, el subcomité editó la Serie de libros “Teóricos latinoamericanos: textos fundamentales” que consiste en la selección de textos paradigmáticos de autores locales traducidos al inglés desde las lenguas de la región, el portugués y el español, y orientados a los foros globales para dar a conocer el pensamiento latinoamericano. (Nazor, 2021)

Al analizar los programas de maestría en Museología de la región, se observa que el campo teórico museológico suele tener un peso limitado en la formación de posgrado. En la mayoría de los casos, la carga horaria dedicada a teoría museológica es similar a las de otras asignaturas, lo que resta profundidad al enfoque teórico dentro del plan curricular.

Ante esta situación planteada, se entiende que una propuesta de postgrado denominada Maestría en Museología, lleva a inferir que los contenidos que se brindan, conformarán el sesgo epistemológico de la teoría museológica como el núcleo científico distintivo y esencial en la formación académica del maestrando, cuyos emergentes serán profesionales entrenados en la investigación, la comunicación del pensamiento, la reflexión crítica y el debate científico de la disciplina entre otras habilidades y conocimientos que provee el dilatado y complejo universo de la museología.

Acordamos en que, como bien señalan Navarro y Tsagaraki (sf., p. 55):

sin una base teórica sólida, el futuro egresado del Máster, carecerá de capacidad para analizar críticamente el rol de los museos, esta situación se ve reflejada en los museos en América Latina, los cuales se han caracterizado por un énfasis en lo práctico, más que en lo teórico, no obstante ello América Latina ha desarrollado una teoría museológica, que, si bien bebe de ideas foráneas, principalmente de Europa, ha sabido incorporar los desarrollos teóricos surgidos de las experiencias autóctonas (por ejemplo, museos comunitarios o museos productivos) y agregan que, desde el punto de vista práctico, el enfoque teórico ha de promover un análisis holístico del quehacer museológico entendido como trabajo interdisciplinario.

ya que la comprensión del fenómeno museo, exige reconocerlo como un espacio donde convergen diversas perspectivas e ideologías vinculadas a políticas de coleccionismo, comunicación, preservación y educación, así como principios de ética, integración, accesibilidad e inclusión que la propia definición de museo promueve. Se trata de un campo esencialmente dialógico y multidisciplinario en constante interacción con las ciencias sociales que requiere que los profesionales manejen marcos conceptuales diversos para interpretar críticamente la realidad museística y cuestionar las prácticas tradicionales, especialmente en el contexto regional.

Se hace evidente que la amplia diversidad en los perfiles de los ingresantes a las maestrías en museología provoca situaciones de inequidad en la formación teórica, en especial entre quienes no cuentan con una formación de grado específica en el área. Esta falta de una base teórica integradora y niveladora puede derivar en una preparación académica insuficiente, aumentando el riesgo de que el estudiante interprete los contenidos de la maestría únicamente desde su disciplina de origen. Cuando el desarrollo teórico es insuficiente, se dificulta la construcción de un lenguaje y un marco conceptual común, lo que conduce a una formación fragmentada e impide consolidar una verdadera identidad profesional en el campo.

Además, resulta pertinente señalar otras variables que inciden en este análisis y que, si bien no forman parte estricta de la indagatoria sobre el peso y estatus de la teoría museológica en los planos de estudio de maestrías en museología en Latinoamérica, deben mencionarse para comprender el contexto de los estudios superiores en la región. Estas variables incluyen el tipo de gestión universitaria en cada país, los sistemas legislativos, los acuerdos sobre reconocimiento y transferencia de créditos, la homologación de títulos en el extranjero, los mecanismos de aseguramiento de la calidad educativa, entre otros factores propios de una región tan diversa. Este panorama sigue siendo muy heterogéneo en el ámbito de las maestrías en museología, aunque se observa una evolución constante hacia la convergencia y la posibilidad de establecer acuerdos comunes en el futuro.

Este estado de incertidumbre en la región se encuentra moderado e impulsado por la influencia de recomendaciones y declaraciones de organismos como UNESCO e ICOM, que aportan definiciones, objetivos y buenas prácticas para orientar el desarrollo del sector museológico local.

Dichas recomendaciones no son legalmente vinculantes, sino que funcionan como un *soft law*, que sirve de guía al desarrollo de la museología a nivel global y regional. Este conjunto de directrices funciona como un derecho blando que moldea la visión sobre el rol de los museos en la sociedad. “Lo que no implica que la influencia del *soft law* sea homogénea en la región, por lo que el impacto de las recomendaciones internacionales depende de cuán “permeable” sean los sistemas jurídicos, administrativos y académicos de cada país” (Cantar, Endere, Levrand, 2024).

En América Latina, uno de los problemas que se presentan, es la falta de criterios unificados para cuantificar la carga horaria de un crédito académico en maestrías en museología, lo cual dificulta la compatibilidad y la movilidad estudiantil en la educación superior. Inspirado en el Proceso de Bologna, el principal desafío es adoptar un marco de referencia común que considere el volumen total de trabajo del estudiante y no solo las horas de clase. “El proyecto Tuning América Latina propuso el Crédito Latinoamericano de Referencia (CLAR), una unidad de valor basada en el trabajo total necesario para cumplir los resultados de aprendizaje, donde un año académico a tiempo completo equivale a 60 créditos.” (Tuning América Latina, sf.) Este estándar facilitaría la comparación y transferencia entre programas y países. Para lograrlo, las universidades deben adaptar sus planes de estudio y reflejan tanto la carga horaria como su equivalencia en créditos, alineándose con el marco regional del CLAR.

La finalidad última de esta unificación de criterio es de facilitar la movilidad estudiantil y el reconocimiento de títulos en la región, un objetivo promovido por UNESCO.

En la actualidad los organismos Internacionales influyen en proporcionar un lenguaje común, un conjunto de valores y criterios técnicos para el debate, conformando un marco referencial conceptual y normativo que, aunque no vinculante, orienta las decisiones gubernamentales, la práctica profesional y la cooperación regional.

En resumen, para avanzar hacia una América Latina museológica menos fragmentada y más cohesionada resulta imprescindible establecer criterios académicos uniformes que permitan una formación de excelencia donde la teoría museológica sea el puente capaz de compatibilizar trayectorias diversas y sentar bases sólidas para una profesionalización real del campo. Solo así podremos garantizar que el ejercicio museológico regional esté nutrido por la pluralidad de orígenes, pero regido por un horizonte compartido de calidad y rigor académico.

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Trust, tools and capacities: Youth perspectives to capacity building in the museum and cultural heritage sector

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For young museum professionals, the future outlook has been two-dimensional in recent years. The post-COVID period, if nothing else, has shown that the future of the career possibilities in the sector is difficult to predict (Weisman Art Museum, 2021). Young museum professionals in particular must be prepared to develop their skills and adapt their activities to new challenges (ESACH, 2023). This requires flexibility, creativity, and a willingness to try new ways of working.

In this article, I will briefly discuss the visions that young heritage professionals have for their sector in the near future. As the future can only be influenced by the present, I will look at the tools and instruments offered by the documents produced in recent years for young heritage professionals. My article has as its core the results of the Future Frequency workshop for young culture heritage professionals 2023-2025.

I argue that young museum professionals' visions of their own field reflect a change in the way we structure cultural heritage as part of society. I base my argument on the recommendations of the CHARTER Alliance Recommendations, which outline the development of the museum profession, and on the recommendations of the ESACH Position Paper. The integration of perspectives from the ESACH Position Paper and the CHARTER Alliance Recommendations into future-oriented cultural heritage thinking advances the discussion about the hopes and fears of young museum professionals regarding their careers. By envisioning a 2050 scenario in which cultural heritage informs all societal decision-making, both documents challenge traditional museum professionalism, which emphasizes certain professional roles. Instead, they offer an interesting perspective on young professionals' own views on future museum work and the skills required for it.

Futures Frequency workshop and results

In spring 2023, at the CHARTER Alliance Workshop on guidelines for innovative/emerging VET and HE curricula in Helsinki, I had an opportunity to arrange a workshop for young cultural heritage experts. At the workshop, the participants brainstormed on the future skills, expertise, ideas, and visions about the transformations in the cultural heritage sector and skills and occupations needed in the future. As a result, the participants formed a future target: How will we see the cultural heritage field in 2050?

Next time I returned to the results in the CHARTER Paris Conference in spring 2024, I went a little further in my vision of the development of professionalism in the sector, where skills are emphasized rather than titles (Neitola, 2024). The topic called me again in spring 2025, when the European Students' Association for Cultural Heritage (ESACH) invited me to give a workshop in collaboration with ICOM Finland regarding the Youth Heritage Days in Albarracín, Spain.

The workshops I arranged were called Futures Frequency. Futures Frequency gets participants tuned

into thinking about a future that is worth imagining and striving for. This method inspires people to think about the future from new perspectives and challenges them to identify ways to act towards a preferred future (Poussa et al., 2021).

The Futures Frequency method helps cultural heritage professionals envision and shape the future by engaging them in structured foresight thinking. It is a participatory futures method developed by Sitra (the Finnish Innovation Fund) to foster futures literacy, which is the ability to understand and influence how the future is shaped. For example, in the UK young professionals working in museums are more often concerned about the key challenges that society faces, and they appreciate that the sector offers lots of opportunities to make real change (Nightingale, 2023).

The goal was to realize that we are often prisoners of our preconceptions when we think about the future. Our thoughts about the future also guide our actions in the present. That is why challenging assumptions about the future and about the museum itself is an important skill. According to Peter H. Welsh (2023), museum studies programs could, and should, be where new models for museums can be explored, criticized, and nurtured.

In the final part of the workshop, participants used the workshop tasks to create their own vision of what the museum sector will look like in 2050 from a professional perspective.

- Vision 1: “In the year 2050 the discussion about cultural heritage in public is mainstream.”
- Vision 2: “In the year 2050 the cultural heritage plays a key role in all decision making in our society.”
- Vision 3: “In the year 2050 cultural heritage is a joy for everyone; we don’t need conservation authorities anymore.”

I summarize the recurring elements of futures thinking in the sector according to the workshop results:

It is worth thinking of the future in plural. Professionals suggest a future where cultural heritage is no longer a niche topic limited to museums, academics, or heritage institutions; it’s part of everyday public life and public discourse. Decisions are made with an awareness of the past, identity, tradition, and long-term continuity. The past is a resource for shaping the future. Decisions are culturally aware, historically informed, and ethically grounded.

Museum professionals have a responsibility to think beyond the present and work toward a future where cultural heritage is deeply valued and collectively cared for. Imagine a future where conservation is so successful and society so attuned to its cultural legacy that formal, top-down control becomes unnecessary.

CHARTER Recommendations

CHARTER, the European Cultural Heritage Skills Alliance, was an Erasmus+ funded blueprint project active from January 2021 to December 2024. Throughout its four years, CHARTER produced a range of reports and resources to highlight the value of cultural heritage and to strengthen the sector’s resilience and responsiveness to current and future challenges.¹ CHARTER provides many insights that are intertwined with the theme of Future Frequency.

According to David Prince and Daniel Laven (2023), in a fast-changing world museums are competing against two major phenomena, both of which have an effect on the understanding of truth and reality

¹ The core heritage skills operate across the six functions described by the CHARTER cultural heritage ecosystem model, viz. Recognition; Preservation & Safeguarding; Engagement & Use; Research & Development/ Education; Management; Governance & Policy-Making.

and hence the world as perceived: (a) the post-truth, MAGA, fake-news agenda on the one hand and (b) the way in which images and narratives are portrayed on the other (Prince & Laven, 2023).

The CHARTER Recommendations seek to provide a roadmap for actions that bolster and sustain the heritage sector and wider community, emphasizing upskilling, future-proofing, and ensuring the recognition and transferability of heritage skills (CHARTER Consortium, 2024). Moreover, they aim to ensure equitable career paths and promote comprehensive data analysis and evidence-driven decision-making in sector governance.

Young professionals and future skills are mentioned in Recommendation 3. Employability and versatility of the heritage workforce are best served by a careful and considered combination of essential core skills and relevant transversal skills, all of which need to be reflected in the learning outcomes of curricula (CHARTER, 2023e) (CHARTER Consortium, 2024).

The recommendation says that heritage transcends disciplinary boundaries, and many professionals typically operate in multidisciplinary teams of practitioners with different training backgrounds, emphasizing communication and interpersonal/intercultural skills (CHARTER Consortium, 2024). The recommendation appears to be in line with Julie Nightingale's observations (Nightingale, 2023). Whereas these core heritage skills are essential for the heritage ecosystem to work, they must be complemented with transversal knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

ESACH Position Paper

The ESACH Position Paper on the Future of Cultural Heritage is a youth-led manifesto that outlines how young people working and studying in cultural heritage envision the future of the field. The paper expresses the values, concerns, and expectations of emerging professionals while calling for action across policy, education, and practice.² The concept for the paper started with building on the existing partnership between ESACH, Europa Nostra, and The Future is Heritage to strategically explore the overlapping themes of the European Year of Youth and cultural heritage.

The position paper highlights the need for inclusivity, collaboration, intergenerational exchange, strengthening the sector, and embracing new technologies by putting forward five principles: inclusion, collaboration, intergenerational exchange and dialogue, strengthening the sector, and new technologies. The document provides practical tips and recommendations on how different principles can be implemented. For example, to implement inclusion, the sector should anchor youth empowerment in the cultural heritage sector and promote innovative outcomes, invest in activities, initiatives, and campaigns led by youth for youth (ESACH, 2023).

Futures Frequency is most related to inclusion: it stimulates a debate about the opportunities for young professionals to contribute to the debate within their own sector and brings together professionals from different fields to discuss common issues and network with each other. Expanding the work of museums as agents of change seems to be in line with the contributions of the FutureMuseum project.³

Volunteering is proportionally more common amongst cultural heritage students and young professionals than in other sectors (33% vs 22%) (Katsarova, 2016). Besides being a mode of civic participation, volunteering is also being used by students and young professionals as a way to gain relevant experience, with some volunteering positions taking over traditional entry-level jobs (ESACH, 2023). One good example of how the Position Paper's message resonates is the European Heritage Youth

² https://www.frh-europe.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/position_paper_youth_for_the_future_of_cultural_heritage.pdf

³ <https://museum-id.com/futuremuseum-project/>

Ambassador Program. Its mission is both to participate in and create opportunities for other young professionals to participate in the development of the sector.

Conclusion

If we take the statement from the results of Futures Frequency, “In the year 2050, cultural heritage plays a key role in all decision-making in our society,” both the ESACH Position Paper and the CHARTER Alliance Recommendations would support and interpret this vision but from different angles and with different strategies.

The ESACH Position Paper and the CHARTER Alliance Recommendations both envision a future where cultural heritage plays a vital societal role, but they differ in focus and perspective. ESACH, a youth-led initiative, presents an aspirational and activist vision that emphasizes participation, inclusion, sustainability, and digital creativity. It advocates for future skills rooted in interdisciplinarity, social justice, and transformative thinking, encouraging young people to see heritage as a tool for positive change.

In contrast, CHARTER, a European policy initiative, takes a more structured and institutional approach, aiming to align heritage education and training with labour market needs. It identifies current and emerging roles in the sector, promotes skills mapping, and supports capacity-building to ensure the sector’s resilience and professionalization.

Both documents stress the importance of digital skills, sustainability, and participatory practices, and both support the integration of heritage into broader social and environmental agendas. However, where ESACH challenges traditional structures, CHARTER seeks to strengthen and modernize them.

Together, they are complementary: ESACH offers the vision and values driven by youth, while CHARTER provides the tools and frameworks to implement systemic change. Both are essential for building a dynamic and future-ready heritage sector.

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La formation des professionnels des musées en Afrique: rôle de l'Ecole du Patrimoine Africain et perspectives

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Permettez-moi de vous remercier pour cette belle opportunité de partager avec vous une réflexion sur un enjeu majeur pour l'avenir du patrimoine africain : la formation des professionnels des musées. Ce thème, au-delà de sa pertinence actuelle, s'inscrit dans une dynamique plus large de renaissance culturelle et de développement durable du continent africain.

Depuis sa création en novembre 1998 à Porto-Novo, l'Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA) s'est imposée comme un acteur central de la formation patrimoniale en Afrique. Institution panafricaine dotée d'un statut international, elle incarne la volonté du continent de doter ses institutions patrimoniales de ressources humaines qualifiées, compétentes et engagées.

Dans cette communication, je reviendrai d'abord sur les origines et les fondements de l'EPA, avant de présenter ses principaux axes d'intervention dans le domaine de la formation. J'aborderai ensuite les réalisations majeures, les défis rencontrés et enfin les perspectives ambitieuses que nous portons pour répondre aux besoins croissants du secteur muséal africain.

Aux origines de l'EPA : une réponse à un besoin structurel

L'EPA est née dans le sillage du programme PREMA (Prévention dans les musées africains), initié par l'ICCROM entre 1990 et 2000. L'objectif de ce programme était de renforcer les compétences des professionnels des musées en matière de conservation préventive et de gestion des collections. L'impact positif du programme PREMA a cependant révélé la nécessité d'institutionnaliser la formation patrimoniale sur le continent.

Ainsi, en novembre 1998, l'EPA est créée avec le soutien de plusieurs partenaires, dont l'Université nationale du Bénin (aujourd'hui Université d'Abomey-Calavi). L'institution bénéficie d'emblée d'un positionnement universitaire tout en affirmant sa vocation panafricaine. Cette vocation s'est progressivement consolidée, d'abord le 14 mai 2009 lorsque le Bénin lui confère le statut d'organisation internationale, puis le 31 janvier 2015 lorsque l'Union africaine lui attribue le statut d'organisation panafricaine à vocation régionale. L'EPA intervient ainsi dans les pays francophones, anglophones, lusophones et hispanophones, et coopère avec nombre de partenaires internationaux (UNESCO, ICCROM, France, Belgique, etc.).

Une mission de formation au service du patrimoine africain

La formation est le premier des quatre mandats statutaires de l'EPA, aux côtés de l'éducation au patrimoine, de l'expertise et de l'édition. Cette mission se décline à travers trois types de formations complémentaires : les formations diplômantes, les formations continues et les formations à la carte.

Le Cours Universitaire International (CUI)

Le premier dispositif mis en place fut le Cours Universitaire International, conçu pour les professionnels de musées, d'archives et de bibliothèques. Ce cursus de deux ans, limité à une vingtaine d'étudiants par cohorte, reposait sur une pédagogie active alliant théorie et pratique. Il a permis de former plus de 2000 professionnels originaires de 30 pays africains.

La Licence professionnelle en Gestion du patrimoine culturel

En 2018, à la demande du gouvernement béninois, l'EPA a mis en place une licence professionnelle en Gestion du patrimoine culturel, en partenariat avec l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi. Ce cursus permet de former des professionnels opérationnels : conservateurs, chargés de collections, médiateurs culturels, gestionnaires de sites, etc.

Les effectifs ont connu une croissance rapide avec 122 diplômés formés à ce jour, pour un total de cinq promotions. Cette dynamique témoigne de l'attractivité de la formation, mais appelle également une adaptation continue des capacités d'accueil et d'encadrement.

La formation continue : diversification et flexibilité

L'EPA propose également des formations continues de courte durée, conçues pour les professionnels en poste ou les institutions patrimoniales. Ces formations sont adaptées aux besoins et peuvent être déployées à Porto-Novo, en ligne ou dans les pays partenaires.

Une attention particulière est portée aux formations pratiques de 4 à 8 semaines, sur des thèmes tels que la conservation préventive, la manipulation des objets, la documentation des collections, la muséographie, etc.

La méthode EPA : théorie, pratique, ancrage terrain

La spécificité de l'EPA réside dans sa méthode pédagogique. Loin d'une approche uniquement théorique, l'enseignement repose sur une interaction constante entre contenus académiques, travaux pratiques, exercices sur site, débats et mises en situation. Cette méthodologie permet une transposition immédiate des compétences dans les contextes professionnels. C'est dans cette dynamique que l'EPA organise en partenariat avec l'Agence Nationale des Patrimoines Touristiques (ANPT) des chantiers écoles nationaux dans lesquels les étudiants et diplômés sont fortement impliqués.

Une institution panafricaine au service du continent

L'EPA a su construire un réseau de coopération avec des institutions muséales, universitaires et patrimoniales à travers toute l'Afrique et au-delà. L'institution agit comme un véritable hub panafricain de formation et de recherche.

Son approche multilingue permet d'intervenir dans toutes les zones culturelles du continent : Afrique de l'Ouest, Afrique centrale, Afrique australe, Afrique de l'Est et Afrique du Nord. L'EPA coopère également avec les diasporas africaines et les partenaires internationaux.

Ses locaux comprennent aujourd'hui des salles de cours, un centre de documentation, un mini-musée pédagogique, des bureaux et des espaces de travail collectif. Des partenariats sont en cours pour le développement d'un laboratoire national de conservation à Porto-Novo.

Perspectives : construire l'avenir de la formation patrimoniale en Afrique

Face à l'accroissement de la demande, à l'évolution des métiers du patrimoine et à la montée des enjeux culturels et environnementaux, l'EPA engage une stratégie de développement ambitieuse et structurante.

Construction d'un nouveau campus

L'un des projets majeurs est la construction d'un campus EPA moderne. Il s'agira d'un complexe pédagogique et scientifique intégré, conçu pour accueillir plusieurs centaines d'étudiants internationaux dans des conditions optimales. Ce campus permettra de mieux répondre aux demandes croissantes de formation et d'augmenter significativement notre capacité d'action.

Renforcement des équipements scientifiques et techniques

L'EPA investit dans des équipements de pointe pour la formation : laboratoires de conservation-restauration, équipements d'analyse des matériaux, dispositifs de documentation numérique, logiciels professionnels, etc. L'objectif est de placer l'EPA au niveau des standards internationaux en matière d'études patrimoniales et de conservation-restauration.

Rénovation du musée pédagogique

Le mini-musée de l'EPA sera entièrement rénové. Il servira de laboratoire d'expérimentation pour les étudiants, tout en proposant une offre de médiation innovante pour les publics scolaires et universitaires.

Ouverture de nouveaux masters

Trois nouveaux parcours de master sont en cours de conception :

- Master en conservation des sites du patrimoine mondial
- Master en conservation-restauration
- Master en médiation culturelle

Ces formations compléteront l'offre de licence et permettront aux professionnels africains de se doter de compétences spécialisées, adaptées aux enjeux contemporains.

Nouvelles licences professionnelles

De nouveaux parcours de licence seront ouverts pour répondre aux besoins du marché de l'emploi :

- Licence en régie des collections
- Licence en muséographie et scénographie
- Licence en gestion des réserves et conservation

Conclusion

L'EPA est aujourd'hui une institution mûre, reconnue, crédible et résolument tournée vers l'avenir. Elle s'inscrit dans une dynamique de transformation profonde du paysage patrimonial africain. Les besoins sont immenses, les attentes fortes, mais les opportunités sont tout aussi nombreuses.

En renforçant ses capacités, en diversifiant ses offres, en innovant dans sa méthodologie et en consolidant ses partenariats, l'EPA entend rester une référence africaine et internationale en matière de formation patrimoniale. Il nous appartient, collectivement, de soutenir cette ambition au service de la mémoire, de la culture et de la dignité du continent africain.

De-occidentalising museology: Bridging the Western gap in natural history museums through Asian perspectives

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In an era characterised by an ecological crisis and the urgent need for systemic transformation, museums are increasingly being called upon to act as agents of sustainability and social change. In this context, natural history museums have the potential to foster ecological awareness, reconnect human and natural narratives and rethink their educational and communicative missions. However, prevailing museological practices within Western institutions frequently remain anchored in approaches rooted in anthropocentric epistemologies.

Contemporary museology is undergoing a profound shift in which it engages with complex social, political and environmental challenges. Among these, the decolonisation of museums has emerged as a key concern, prompting critical reassessment of the epistemological foundations that have long shaped the museum as an institution. In numerous non-Western contexts, the establishment of natural history museums occurred under the influence of colonial powers, frequently marginalising local knowledge systems and alternative forms of knowledge.

This paper explores the need to de-occidentalise museology by foregrounding East Asian perspectives where natural history museums present innovative and intrinsic approaches to sustainability communication grounded in local epistemologies and biocultural interdependence. Through comparative fieldwork conducted in Japan, Taiwan and Singapore, the study examines how these institutions challenge conventional Western models.

Drawing on this cross-cultural analysis, the paper argues that East Asian museological practices can inspire a paradigmatic shift, encouraging Western museums (including undervalued Italian institutions) to adopt more pluralistic and transcultural approaches. Situated within broader debates on sustainability, decolonisation and the future of museums, this research contributes to a growing call for reimagining natural history museums as spaces of global dialogue.

Theoretical context

Since its origins in fourth century BCE Greece, the *mouseion* was conceived as a space devoted to the Muses, embodying knowledge, creativity and exploration of the natural world (Parisi, 2024). Over the centuries, museums have undergone radical transformations in response to shifting social, political and cultural paradigms. As Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Bennett (1995) have shown, the modern museum emerged in conjunction with Enlightenment rationality and colonial expansion, constructing an epistemological framework rooted in Eurocentric ideals of civilisation, order and universalism. The export of this institutional model to non-Western regions, often via colonial or imperial imposition, brought with it these underlying assumptions, reshaping local cultural ecosystems (Cai, 2025).

Natural history museums, conceived as “libraries of life,” document the formation of the planet, the evolution of biodiversity and humanity’s place within the natural world. Their mission today increasingly intersects with pressing global concerns such as sustainability, climate change and human well-being (Parisi & Thun Hohenstein, 2024).

In this regard, museums are being challenged to evolve not only through practices of environmental stewardship, energy efficiency and ecological education (Garthe, 2022) but also through more profound epistemological and ethical shifts. As Yuqin (2008) observes, natural history museums are uniquely positioned to promote a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature, fostering awareness and responsibility through education and storytelling. Yet a persistent gap remains between the conceptual embrace of sustainability and its actual integration into museum strategies, especially within smaller institutions, such as many in the Italian context.

This research investigates how natural history museums, particularly in East Asia, are reimagining their role in culturally specific ways. While many of these institutions stem from colonial or semi-colonial origins, they have undergone gradual processes of reinvention that reflect local political, historical and spiritual traditions. Nevertheless, the enduring dominance of Western museological paradigms continues to limit the development of autonomous curatorial languages, often marginalising alternative epistemologies and Indigenous interpretive frameworks (Cai, 2025).

As Bhatti (2012) points out, a genuine postcolonial museology must critically interrogate the Eurocentric foundations of the museum, recognising that Asian museums are not passive imitators but potential laboratories of epistemological innovation. Along these lines, Brulon Soares (2021) calls for a radical rethinking of museological assumptions challenging the myths of objectivity, neutrality and universal knowledge. Decolonising the museum, he argues, goes beyond the physical restitution of artefacts; it requires opening museums to plural perspectives.

By positioning East Asian museums within this theoretical context, this research aims to question the assumed universality of Western museological models and foreground the importance of cultures more integrated with the natural environment than typically Western ones. As proposed by Ruth B. Phillips (2022), it is necessary to overcome the colonial-decolonial dichotomy by moving towards a social museum model, an inclusive and interdisciplinary framework that embraces multiple voices, breaks with Western norms and reconfigures the value systems underlying cultural interpretation.

Methodology and case studies

This study is based on extensive field research conducted as part of a doctoral project in scientific museology, which involved site visits, interviews with museum professionals and a comparative analysis of exhibition and educational practices. Interviews focused on specific topics analysed with museum staff in order to deepen their communication strategies and to understand the challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of the different dimensions of sustainability. These interviews provided insight into the communication strategies adopted in the various museums and an understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to the integration of sustainability into museum practices.

The research provides valuable insights into how alternative museum models can enhance global discussions on sustainability and public engagement.

The overall methodology is designed to compare Italian and East Asian case studies, with the aim of contributing to the existing literature by addressing the underrepresentation of both Italian natural history museums and non-Western approaches to sustainability communication.

As with the Asiatic ones, the Italian natural history context does not emerge in the literature, especially with regard to its relationship with sustainability and well-being.

The investigation conducted in Italy examined different categories of natural history museums, starting with the two most significant at a national level, and three university museums.

Meanwhile, the non-Western case studies analysed museum practices and philosophies in East Asia, specifically in Taiwan, Singapore and Japan.

The East presents a rich cultural tradition based on connection with nature and a deep respect for ecological balance, offering an under-researched field of analysis for the exploration of new perspectives in the relationship between museums and sustainability. The opportunity to learn from Eastern museum practices presents itself as a bridge for intercultural dialogue and a source of inspiration for innovation in the museum sector.

Research on these aspects was carried out through a period of international doctoral mobility in the following Museums:

- National Taiwan Museum, Taipei, Taiwan;
- Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Singapore;
- Tokyo National Museum of Nature and Science, Japan;
- Nagoya University Museum, Japan;
- Lake Biwa Museum, Shiga, Japan.

This investigation aims to present the observations, critical analyses and reflections that have emerged from this experience, with the aim of enriching our understanding of the link between natural history museums and sustainability communication by grasping not only the unique challenges and opportunities that characterise these contexts but also to identify possible strategies and approaches that can be adapted and implemented in global museum contexts.

In this way, this research aims to contribute not only to our understanding of the relationship between museums, sustainability and wellbeing but also to promote a transformative dialogue that crosses geographical and cultural boundaries.

Findings: Reframing museological practices through Asian perspectives

The comparative findings of this study underscore a fundamental difference in how sustainability is conceptualised and communicated across cultural contexts.

The findings reveal how natural history museums in East Asia offer alternative models that challenge dominant Western museological paradigms, particularly in their approach to sustainability communication. Through the analysis carried out, significant differences emerge between Asian institutions, rooted in bioregional epistemologies and multisensory engagement, and Italian museums, which remain more aligned with traditional object-centred exhibition models.

Asian museums demonstrate a culturally embedded narrative of sustainability that bridges nature and human responsibility, often drawing from local traditions and non-Western paradigms. Institutions inquired embody an approach that emphasizes interdependence, emotional resonance, and regional specificity. This contrasts with the Italian context, where communication remains largely passive, and sustainability is addressed in compartmentalized or programmatic ways, often disconnected from exhibition narratives.

Therefore, Asian institutions present opportunities for rethinking how museums can act as sites of ecological empathy and cultural sustainability.

Fieldwork reveals that these institutions weave ecological narratives with local worldviews, creating visitor experiences that emphasize bioregionalism and emotional connection. These approaches align with Logan and Sutter (2012) and Falk (2016), who describe a shift from didactic to empathetic, multi-sensory museology capable of fostering behavioural change. In contrast, many Italian museums, while

advanced in accessibility and inclusion, tend to rely on more traditional and less emotionally engaging sustainability messages.

These results support the argument that Asian museological practices offer valuable alternatives to Western practices. By embracing pluralistic and transcultural frameworks, museums can shift toward more effective, inclusive and culturally responsive forms of engagement. In this light, East Asia does not only represent a geographic site of comparison but also a critical lens through which to deconstruct the Western-centric canon of natural history museology for environmental sustainability communication.

Conclusion

This paper argues that natural history museums in Asia adopt a more integrated and culturally rooted approach to communicating environmental sustainability compared to their Italian counterparts. The comparative analysis of case studies shows how Asian museums often present sustainability through immersive exhibitions grounded in local epistemologies and non-Western ecological knowledge systems.

Situating this comparison within current debates on decolonisation, sustainability and well-being, the study advocates for rethinking Western museology through a pluralistic, multi-cultural lens.

Integrating sustainability into museum practice is shown not only as an environmental imperative but also as cultural sustainability where local traditions and knowledge systems shape the future of museum work. The findings highlight the potential of cross-cultural dialogue to enrich global sustainability discourses in natural history museums.

In conclusion, this research underscores the evolving role of natural history museums as agents of sustainability and well-being, capable of promoting both ecological awareness and behavioural change. The comparative analysis reveals distinct approaches and shared challenges, pointing to opportunities for cross-cultural learning. It fills a gap in literature by addressing the underrepresentation of Asian museums in sustainability communication practices, while also noting the limited international visibility of Italian natural history museums.

This cross-cultural exchange not only enhances our understanding of how museums can drive social and ecological transformation but also underlines the need for continued research on the integration of multicultural practices and collaborative models.

The future line of research should focus on exploring how these international collaborations (especially towards East Asia) can refine and improve museum practices, helping institutions to better serve diverse audiences and contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive future.

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Building sustainable capacity in museums through digital leadership and networked learning

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Museums are accelerating toward digital transformation, but their future sustainability will depend not on technology alone, but on how they recognise, invest in and activate human expertise. A central question now facing the sector is how museum professionals themselves can participate in shaping the emerging AI frontier, drawing on their values, practices and institutional missions. This paper argues that to thrive in the age of intelligence, museums must reframe digital leadership as a core institutional competency that not only shapes internal practice and training but also radiates outward, leveraging museum expertise to contribute meaningfully to wider conversations about responsible and ethical AI development.

A MuseumNext overview (Styx, 2024) outlines diverse ways museums were leveraging AI by mid2024. Examples included personalised audio guides, visitor journey forecasting, collections digitisation, chat-bot usage and machinevision analytics to support operations and public engagement. This exemplifies a pattern of adoption focused on the application of new AI technologies without considering how museum professionals might shape their development.

The arguments presented are grounded in insights from the *Sloane Lab: Looking Back to Build Future Shared Collections*, a UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded research project that set out to digitally reconnect now dispersed British Museum foundational collections and explore the human dimensions interlinked with this technical endeavour. Sloane Lab findings revealed that sustainable transformation may depend less on technical tools than on the sector's capacity to adapt strategically, ethically, and collaboratively.

Building on this and informed by the author's lived experience in university museum leadership, this paper explores how museum professionals are already equipped, with the right support, to shape AI futures that serve institutional missions and public value within the heritage sector and beyond. It closes with provocations for how networked learning, interdisciplinary leadership and human-guided AI might enable more inclusive, imaginative and resilient forms of museum innovation.

Museums have historically been slow adopters of emerging technologies. The exponential growth in AI innovation challenges museums' capacity to stay up to date in the age of intelligence. AI is likely to reach institutions unevenly, with smaller organisations left behind. However, this should not delay critical engagement now. Leading voices in the space of Human and AI interactions have suggested that we must also focus on the human side of this equation and have a greater understanding of our objectives and ambitions beyond optimisation, automation and accessibility.

For anyone trying to follow developments in AI, the current landscape can feel overwhelming. Information is abundant, technical advances arrive daily and reliable frameworks for understanding change are difficult to identify. This paper draws on insights from two leading thinkers in the field: futurist and

entrepreneur Ross Dawson and renowned AI expert and entrepreneur Daniel Hulme. Their insights suggest that we begin not with technology, but with people and institutional purpose.¹

This alignment echoes Ross Dawson’s “Humans + AI” framework, where he states, “we can do more together than we can do apart,” highlighting how human–machine collaboration can amplify impact across contexts (Dawson, n.d.). Daniel Hulme emphasises that AI is most effective when it is not only aligned with institutional objectives but also with human values, embedding strategic purpose, ethical reasoning and stakeholder governance into its application to ensure that AI augments rather than replaces human decision-making (Satalia Team, 2024).

What was the Sloane Lab and why does it matter?

*Sloane Lab: Looking Back to Build Future Shared Collections*² explored how digital technologies might reconnect dispersed collections. Using the historical case study of Sir Hans Sloane’s collections, originally housed in the British Museum and now distributed across multiple institutions, the project developed an aggregator to reunite data from these holdings. As Nyhan et al. (2023) explain, “data of contemporary and historical catalogue records are converted into the Resource Description Framework (RDF) format and ingested in a central Knowledge Base” (p. 24). Led by a consortium of partners from UCL, TU Darmstadt, the British Museum and the Natural History Museum, the project tested both the technical possibilities and the interpretive implications of digital reunification.

As part of this process, the team engaged in wide-ranging conversations that spanned infrastructure and human-centred challenges. These included a strand of participatory research involving semi-structured interviews with heritage professionals who are directly involved in digitisation, digital infrastructure and data strategy, aiming to build a fuller picture of the institutional capabilities and constraints shaping digital infrastructure from the bottom up.³

Amassed in the 18th century, the Sloane collections are entangled with Britain’s colonial history: Sloane’s collecting was funded in part by profits linked to the transatlantic slave trade and investments in private companies such as the Royal African Company and profits from plantations in Jamaica. Linking these collections digitally prompted critical reflection on the enduring legacies of empire, imperialism, slavery and dispossession. The Sloane Lab hence also indicated some of the potential of digital infrastructure to make visible histories that have traditionally been marginalised, ignored or suppressed.

Among the significant findings from Sloane Lab (Humbel, 2024) with direct relevance to this paper are the following:

- There is a need for stronger cross-sector collaboration between cultural institutions, universities, and technology developers.⁴

1 UCL entrepreneur in residence, Daniel Hulme, was founder and CEO of Satalia that exited to global marketing company WWP in 2021 where Hulme is now Chief AI Officer.

2 See *Sloane Lab: Looking Back to Build Future Shared Collections* (<https://sloanelab.org>) for a full list of team members and their institutional affiliations. Sloane Lab was one of five Discovery Projects funded under the UK’s Art and Humanities Research Council’s *Towards a National Collection* (TaNC) programme. The wider TaNC initiative represented a major investment of £18.5 million in digital heritage infrastructure, described by the AHRC as “the largest investment of its kind to be undertaken to date, anywhere in the world” (Arts and Humanities Research Council, n.d.).

3 This component of the project was published in an article that focused on the socio-cultural challenges present in such digital infrastructure endeavours (Humbel, 2024).

4 While this may not be a new proposition, the absence of such collaboration is arguably a reason why many initiatives have not worked.

- To support sustainable development, the sector must build persistent mechanisms for dialogue: spaces where heritage professionals, technologists and users can share insights, articulate needs and inform policy over the long term.

Building on these findings, we can try to imagine what a more future-ready, human-centred approach to digital transformation might look like.

Heritage institutions are custodians of vast datasets as digitisation efforts expand. This has given rise to the *collections-as-data* paradigm: the notion that collection data can be rendered machine-readable and subjected to algorithmic processing (Padilla et al., 2019). Funders and institutions responded by prioritising investment in digital infrastructure to widen access (Humbel et al., 2024). While this infrastructure expansion has not necessarily come at the expense of staff development, the two have rarely progressed hand-in-hand. Without parallel investment in human capital and hindered by legacy structures and project-based funding models, the promise of digital transformation, especially as AI gains traction, risks outpacing the institutions meant to steward it.

This paper proposes that we start with museum professionals: their practices, proficiencies and fluencies. By identifying how their existing expertise aligns with the forms of human input most needed for meaningful AI development, I seek to clarify both where the sector is already strong and where new capacities are needed. This alignment is summarised in Table 1, developed with AI expert and CEO of Xsite Shachar Grembek, and is offered as a thinking model for designing networked training and peer-led knowledge exchange. Museum professionals bring an under-leveraged set of expertise that aligns closely with the kinds of human input needed to develop AI-driven solutions that are ethical, meaningful and institutionally relevant for heritage sector and cross sector application.

Museum Expertise / AI Collaboration matrix: a proposition for strategic direction

	Collaboration area	Museum role	AI alignment
1	Bias-Aware Data Curation	Museum professionals are skilled at identifying gaps in documentation, especially regarding communities and perspectives historically underrepresented	AI systems trained on existing data often reflect embedded societal biases. Museum expertise can ensure that training datasets are critically reviewed and expanded to include diverse, ethically sourced information thereby reducing harm and promoting fairness from the foundation.
2	Accessibility	Museums have long-standing experience in making exhibitions and content accessible to diverse audiences, including those with disabilities, language differences, and limited digital skills.	While AI can automate and personalise content, it often overlooks accessibility by default. Museum professionals bring vital expertise in inclusive design, helping shape AI interfaces that are multilingual, intuitive, and equitable in their interaction design.
3	Narrative Justice and Inclusive Output	Museum professionals understand how stories are told, which voices dominate, and which are silenced. They are trained to surface complexity and enable shared authority in interpretation.	AI-generated outputs (like labels, summaries, or recommendations) can unintentionally reinforce dominant narratives. Museum professionals can ensure that these outputs are representative, pluralistic, and respectful of contested histories, promoting narrative equity.
4	Culturally Sensitive Mediation	Museums often work with sacred objects, trauma-related histories, or culturally sensitive materials. Professionals know when to present, when to pause, and when to consult with source communities.	AI lacks the intuition to handle sensitive topics. Museum guidance is critical to avoid trivialisation or misrepresentation of content that requires careful contextualisation and respect.
5	Community-Centred Development	Museums are accountable to the publics they serve and increasingly engage in participatory processes that centre local voices.	Responsible AI must be developed with communities, not just for them. Museum professionals can lead inclusive design and decision-making processes that build trust, relevance, and social accountability into AI tools.

Museum Expertise / AI Collaboration matrix ©Nina Pearlman and Shachar Grembek, 2025

Toward a human-centred AI future: A strategic shift

Having mapped where museum expertise aligns with the competencies needed for ethical and impactful AI development, the next step is to ask: how might we activate this expertise through new models of capacity-building?

As museums adapt to increasingly complex demands, of which AI is only one part, there is a growing need to rethink how leadership functions across the institution. Given that digital and AI technologies now intersect with every aspect of museum work, from curation and collections care to education, governance and visitor experience, staff at all levels and across disciplines should be empowered to contribute to strategic, ethical and technically informed decisions. A broader, more participatory approach to leadership is not only key to fostering innovation, but also essential for ensuring long-term institutional resilience.

When and if museums adapt to AI-enabled practices, the transformation is likely to extend beyond individual job roles to the very architecture of museum careers. Challenges around entry into the sector are not new nor are they solely the result of digital change. Informal often low-paid pathways such as volunteering and internships and assistant roles have long functioned as gateways into the profession, but they are increasingly unsustainable. While automation and tightening funding models may accelerate the shift, they reflect and intensify a deeper, systemic issue around equity and access in museum employment.

The challenge is to design new, intentional professional ecosystems that provide access, mentorship and progression without relying on unstable or exploitative early-career roles. If museums are serious about digital transformation, they must also invest in equitable talent development: cultivating pathways that combine digital fluency with critical thinking, ethical awareness and interdisciplinary collaboration.

To build such a future, I propose three interlinked strategies:

- **Relational digital learning platforms**
Museums need real-time environments for cross-sector collaboration: spaces where professionals and technologists can co-develop tools, share insights and adapt to fast-changing technologies.
- **Strategic investment in digital leadership**
Capacity-building must go beyond technical skills to include ethical literacy, policy fluency and organisational foresight.
- **Human-guided AI collaboration**
Individually or collectively museums should define their own terms for AI integration. Rather than replacing human judgment, AI should enhance it, supporting collections care, interpretation and access in ways that are guided by curatorial knowledge, community accountability and public mission.

Together, these strategies reaffirm the social and cultural purpose of museums and adapt to the accelerating pace of AI development, not by museums becoming technical systems, but by leveraging their human assets, institutional values and interdisciplinary capacities.

Importantly, the contribution of the heritage sector does not stop at its own institutional boundaries. The insights, methods and ethical commitments cultivated in heritage institutions can inform AI development in other domains, particularly in how to embed cultural sensitivity, public accountability and creative and community insights. Equally, learning from other sectors, such as health, education, tourism, business, marketing and civic technologies, can help museums anticipate challenges, adopt agile methods and imagine new forms of engagement. Cross-sector collaboration must not be incidental

but foundational to building futures where museums help shape more just, informed and imaginative societies.

Provocations for discussion

- What relational infrastructure do we need to make networked learning real and equitable across the sector?
- How can small museums, archives and under-resourced organisations gain a seat at the AI design table?
- Can we reimagine funding models to prioritise human capacity alongside digital infrastructure?
- How do we build a common language between curators, developers and policymakers?
- What kinds of entry points, support systems and values must we design now to ensure that the next generation of museum professionals can thrive in a Human/AI future?
- What does leadership look like in a Human/AI future in museums, and who gets to lead?

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A contributory approach: Tracing participatory curatorial processes at the Museum of Vancouver

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This paper examines key aspects of the participatory curatorial processes employed at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV) during the development of the exhibition, *All Together Now: Vancouver Enthusiasts and Their Worlds* (ATN) (June 23, 2016 – March 19, 2017). Drawing from an ethnographic case study in my doctoral research in museum anthropology (Roy, 2023), I unpack the intricate behind-the-scenes praxis involving museum staff and contemporary collectors. The ATN exhibition serves as a compelling instance of MOV's institutional redirection from a traditional collections-based model to one deeply rooted in engagement, prioritizing public participation and civic museography. My analysis details the curatorial development of ATN, highlighting how various public participants, from collectors to students to museum audiences, contributed to its formation and the social relationships that came into being throughout the process.

Towards a civic museography

Beginning in 2008, the Museum of Vancouver underwent a profound institutional transformation, shifting from a conventional museum practice towards an innovative approach centered on public engagement and local, contemporary collecting, which exemplifies what museum anthropologist Christina Kreps (2020) defines as a broader “engagement turn” in museology. MOV's civic museography¹ is designed to identify issues of public concern and interest by actively seeking community input, which profoundly shapes how MOV collects stories and engages audiences.

The traditional view of museums as authoritative institutions with curators as experts (Ames, 1992; Bennett, 1995) is challenged by a growing post-museum lens² (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Simon, 2010), which advocates for museums to transition to more collaborative, inclusive civic spaces. This perspective shifts the focus towards museums as platforms for dialogue and social service, moving beyond merely collecting and exhibiting artefacts. By examining the process of developing ATN, MOV's focus on contemporary local collectors offers a critical opportunity to reflect on the role of older, global collections, some of which are being deaccessioned³ to prioritize local collectors' initiatives. This institutional redirection is not merely a change in collecting policy but a fundamental shift in how the

1 Civic Museography is a concept that posits city museums in the 21st century as cultural agencies for democratic dialogue and social change, actively engaging with public concerns and seeking community participation (Gosselin, 2011).

2 The Post-Museum Lens is a theoretical framework that emerged from the 1970s, as articulated by Hooper-Greenhill, which places central importance on creating civic spaces for public participation, dialogue, and social service, moving beyond traditional roles of collecting and exhibiting (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006).

3 Deaccessioning and creating a collections plan to help shape this process was influenced by MOV's Mindful Collecting Symposium hosted by James Gardner in 2017. For more insight on this process, refer to: Gardner, James B. and Elizabeth Merritt. 2012 [2002]. “Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy.” In *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, edited by Gail Anderson, 431–35. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.

museum interacts with its community and defines its values and overall purpose (Roy, 2023). In the next section, I examine how the move towards an engagement-based model represents a deliberate effort to make MOV more relevant and responsive to the needs and interests of its local audiences and communities (Roy, 2023).

All Together Now: A model of contributory curation

The *All Together Now* (ATN) exhibition illustrates MOV's adoption of a contributory curatorial approach where participants "are solicited to provide limited and specified objects, actions, or ideas to an institutionally controlled process" (Simon, 2010, p. 187)⁴. This required less time and fewer resources than collaborative or co-curatorial models would have. In these models, ongoing collaborative meetings with participants would have been required throughout every stage of the exhibition and program development. While Gosselin wrote the exhibition's panel text, she chose what to write based on her interviews with the participating collectors. Moreover, the collectors chose which objects in their collections they wanted displayed. In addition, the collectors had editing power over the panel content and made corrections to Gosselin's text when necessary. This contributory approach was applied throughout various stages of the exhibition development process and included multiple levels of internal and external participatory involvement. That is, Gosselin included team meetings for staff feedback, soliciting local collectors, interviewing them for their stories, and inviting university students to create film projects on local collectors. Audience contributions were also gathered via social media.

The inception of ATN was an initial focus on Major Matthews⁵, Vancouver's first city archivist, which organically expanded to include a broader engagement with contemporary collectors in the Greater Vancouver region. Through the dynamic and responsive nature of the adopted contributory approach, the curatorial vision was able to shift its emerging themes through community input from a vast array of local collectors (Roy, 2023).

The role of diverse collectors and social connections

The success of ATN hinged on the active involvement of a wide array of participants. Beyond museum staff, the collaboration included designers and photographers and 20 local collectors who became central figures by sharing their personal collections and stories, which, as I observed, often highlighted a deeply social endeavor rather than a solitary pursuit.

The contributory approach invited collectors to share their unique "worlds," transforming the museum into a space where personal passions intersected with broader narratives embedded in Vancouver's social fabric. For instance, Willow Yamauchi showcased her father's drag collection including five dresses, photographs, and ephemera from his drag performing group, the Bovines. Her contribution not only documented a significant local drag scene but also connected to a parallel MOV event, "Undressing Drag," which hosted two local drag queen performances and a presentation by former MOV curator and collector Ivan Sayers on the history of the drag community in Vancouver. Harold Steeves, a Richmond city councillor and fourth-generation farmer, presented his meticulous collection of historic seeds, farm implements, and documents, offering a tangible link to Steveston's agricultural past and ongoing debates about urban development and food security. David Moe, manager and owner of Barber Prosthetics Clinic in Vancouver, displayed his collection of older prosthetic models. His contribution offered a unique insight into the history of medical innovation and the evolving relationship between technology and the human body. Lyanne Smith, a transit enthusiast and retired Vancouver TransLink employee, showcased her comprehensive collection of public transit memorabilia. Her

4 For a detailed account of contributory project examples see Nina Simon (2010, 203-230), Chapter 6: Visitors as Contributors.

5 See Daphne Sleight (2008) for an in-depth autobiographical account of Matthews's life and archival work. Sleight documents the life of Major James Matthews who became the first archivist of Vancouver in 1933.

involvement highlighted the deep social connections among transit collectors and the collaborative process in which museum staff worked alongside Smith and her peers to sort, cull and interpret the collection. This exemplified how the museum facilitated engagement not just with objects but with the individuals and their shared passions. I argue that these examples demonstrate how the exhibition moved beyond simply showcasing objects to illuminating the intricate social networks and personal stories that define collecting practices.

Institutional redirection: From collections to engagement

The ATN process demonstrates MOV's redirection away from a collections-based to an engagement-based model. This meant that the exhibition design and interpretive strategies were fundamentally shaped by the desire to encourage visitor participation. The prioritization of multi-sensorial elements, such as interactive displays and opportunities for visitors to share their own collecting practices and stories online and within the exhibition, were central to this approach. This is in line with Bennett's observation that in the late 20th century, museums began adopting "embodied, active and participatory relationships" between the museum exhibitions, collections and visitors (2006, p. 277). Within ATN's participatory framework, visitors are invited to share their own collecting experiences on social media, using the hashtag #AllTogetherNowMOV and on a "post-it wall" creating a tangible, evolving tapestry of public input. However, as Kreps (2013) points out, these participatory elements present longer term staffing and resource challenges in managing public submissions, navigating time constraints of a physical exhibition, and ensuring a genuine representation of diverse voices remain for easily accessible online viewing.

Deaccessioning: A hidden process revealed

The *All Together Now* exhibition provided a public discussion on the often-hidden museum practice of deaccessioning, which Gosselin used to describe MOV's own institutional shift and some of its impacts on museum collections. The final section of the exhibition, aptly titled "Letting Go," presented a concrete example of deaccessioning MOV's historical Drier Shell Collection. This aligns with Gosselin's historical thinking pedagogy (2016), which aims to make the museum's work more explicit and demystify its practices. As she stated, "The Letting Go gallery is a good illustration of this" (V. Gosselin, personal communication, May 26, 2016).

The Drier Shell Collection, gifted to MOV in the 1930s, no longer aligned with the museum's mission after its 2008 refocus on Vancouver-centric collections. After 85 years, the Drier collection was partially deaccessioned; thousands of its shells were donated to museums in New Zealand, Australia and the United States, while the rest were composted locally. This narrative emphasized forging new connections with other institutions and communities, showcasing how deaccessioning can ensure a collection's ongoing usefulness.

Crucially, the "Letting Go" section extended this concept to visitors, inviting them to "let go" of their own objects. A "Collection Exchange" panel (2016) encouraged visitors to "leave behind small collections ...for others to take home...We encourage you to leave a note telling the story of your collection." Using old storage units from the museum, this initiative allowed individuals to shed unwanted private items and acquire new ones, thus inspiring future collecting projects. This connected MOV's institutional practices to individual collecting habits, fostering a reciprocal act of contribution and exchange.

Conclusion

Overall, the *All Together Now* exhibition is an important case study for understanding contemporary participatory curation through a contributory lens. By involving a diverse array of actors, MOV successfully created an exhibition that highlighted the social practices and relationships inherent in col-

lecting, demonstrating its institutional redirection towards an engagement-based model. Overall, ATN not only showcased personal collections but, more significantly, illuminated the profound social connections and worlds built through the act of collecting, offering a compelling vision for the future of museums in a participatory age. While the contributory approach offers significant benefits, it also presents unique challenges. Thus, I argue that further examination is warranted on the sustainability of intensive participatory models, including the balance between a desire for deep engagement and the practicalities of resources and staff time.

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Museology in India: Challenges, adaptations, and sustainable models

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Museum studies, or museology, is a dynamic and evolving academic discipline that explores both the theory and practice of museums. Its development, however, varies globally, shaped by historical, cultural, institutional, and policy contexts. In India, despite a rich heritage and a network of around 1,200 museums (Seth & Sadiya, 2023), museology remains a niche field with limited institutional representation and public visibility.

The growth of museology in India is deeply rooted in the country's historical traditions and diverse museum landscape. However, it continues to face structural, pedagogical, and professional challenges. Western models have long influenced its academic trajectory, but there is a growing effort to contribute context-specific perspectives that reimagine museums as inclusive and socially engaged institutions.

In recent years, growing student interest, curricular experimentation, and innovative outreach programmes have sought to bridge the gap between theory and practice, academia and museums, and museums and communities.

This paper highlights the evolution of museology as an academic discipline in India, maps the current challenges, and presents emerging sustainable models that integrate contextual learning, interdisciplinary training, and community engagement. This paper argues that a practice driven, inclusive, and locally rooted museology curriculum, coupled with stronger collaboration between museums and academic institutions, is essential for the sustainable growth and relevance of the museology discipline.

The evolution of museology in India

The theoretical foundations of Indian museology were influenced by early Czech museologists and expanded by key Indian scholars. V. H. Bedekar's work emphasized that museology is not confined to museums alone but addresses broader questions of humanity's relationship with heritage, community, and the environment (Bedekar, 1987). Anupama Bhatnagar similarly traced the origins of museological thought to traditional practices of collecting and preserving culturally significant objects (Bhatnagar, 1999). Both argued for a wider scope for museology, extending beyond institutional boundaries to encompass broader cultural, environmental, and social considerations.

India's engagement with international museological discourse dates back to the early years of ICOFOM, where Indian representatives contributed perspectives grounded in local realities. Bedekar, in particular, viewed museology as an "instrumental discipline" that addresses professional challenges and informs museum practice through innovative training and methods (Shah, 2019, p. 166). However, he also cautioned against attributing the discipline's limited impact solely to theoretical shortcomings, instead pointing to the unresponsive and structurally rigid nature of many museum environments.

Establishment of museology as a formal academic discipline in India

The institutionalization of museology began in the mid-20th century. Although India's first museum was established in 1814, and the need for professional training was recognised as early as the 1907 All India Museum Conference, no concrete steps were taken until the 1950s (Banerjee, 1990). The 1936 Markham and Hargreaves Report reiterated the need for structured training (Markham & Hargreaves, 1936); however, formal steps were not implemented during the colonial period despite recognition of the issue. As N.R. Banerjee later observed, although the British administration was aware of the situation, a systematic approach to museum training did not materialise (Markham & Hargreaves, 1936).

A major shift occurred in 1952 with the launch of the first academic programme in museology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, marking a significant step in the decolonisation of museology education in India (Shah, 2019). Subsequently, several institutions introduced academic programmes in museology: the University of Calcutta, Banaras Hindu University, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Aligarh Muslim University and the National Museum Institute (now the Indian Institute of Heritage). Today, a few more universities offer postgraduate degrees and diplomas, including combined courses in museology and conservation. Despite this progress, access to museological education in India remains limited.

Challenges facing the field of museology in India

The institutionalisation of museology as an academic discipline in India has progressed gradually, yet it continues to face challenges that limit its growth, relevance and impact. Key concerns include curriculum design, professional training, limited employment opportunities and alignment with contemporary museum practice.

Need for more contextualised and inclusive curriculum design

Many Indian museology courses continue to draw heavily from Western frameworks with limited regionally relevant scholarship. Museology curricula in India struggle to balance global standards with the diverse realities of Indian museums, which vary in collections, governance and audiences.

Academic training tends to emphasise standardised global guidelines, while actual museum work is often situational, pragmatic and resource driven. This highlights the need for curricula that not only bridge theoretical understanding with hands-on training but also reflect the nuanced realities of Indian museum practice.

Limited training institutions and professional disparity

India has around 1,200 museums, but only about eight institutions offer postgraduate training in museology. Despite the demand for skilled professionals, training opportunities remain limited. Museology is not a mandatory qualification for most museum roles, leading to the appointment of candidates from unrelated disciplines while trained museologists face employment challenges. Many curatorial posts remain vacant, though recent moves by some government museums to prioritise museology degrees signal gradual progress toward recognising specialized training.

Inadequate collaboration between academia and museums

Museology as an academic field has contributed valuable ideas, but their implementation in museums is inconsistent. There is limited communication between institutions, and museologists are often not involved in museum planning and decision-making processes. Bedekar emphasised that while museology can generate impactful innovations, these are not always adopted, either due to institutional inertia or a lack of practical foresight (Bedekar, 1987).

Gap between community engagement and cultural accessibility

Although Indian museums are moving toward community-focused approaches, they still struggle to reach underserved and marginalised audiences. Despite an increasing focus on in-situ preservation and community relevance, museums struggle to engage people who do not typically visit these institutions or recognise their cultural rights to access and participate in heritage. This reflects a deeper issue of limited cultural inclusion and public awareness, especially among marginalised communities.

Adaptation strategies and sustainable models

In response to these challenges, a number of adaptation strategies and practice-based models have been developed – particularly at the Indian Institute of Heritage (IIH), where I am engaged as a faculty member in the Department of Museology. The following points will be illustrated through successful case studies drawn from my work and departmental initiatives aimed at creating sustainable and adaptable training models.

Contextualising curriculum through Indian case studies

Recognising the gaps of Western-centric models, the curriculum integrates Indian case studies and regional examples to provide students with a more grounded and relevant learning experience.

- **Practice-based learning and field exposure:** Museology programmes in India incorporate compulsory museum visits, fieldwork and project-based assignments. Internship is also mandatory, giving students immersive experience in the museum field.
- **Training in audience-centric museum education:** At IIH, we equip students with tools to create educational resources that connect museum collections with classroom learning. The author has developed various resources to train students in object-based pedagogy and programme design. Students are encouraged to pilot these resources with diverse real-world audiences, allowing them to refine their outputs based on audience feedback.

Community-curated museums and inclusive heritage practices

The department has supported the development of community museums in several regions of India. These projects train local stakeholders who are not formally trained museologists in managing and interpreting their collections. Rooted in the communities' cultural context, these models promote local ownership, long-term sustainability and the decolonisation of heritage narratives.

Bridging museums and society through tailored initiatives

The Department of Museology at IIH is undertaking an action research project to position museology as a tool for social inclusion. Moving beyond traditional museum spaces, the department engages diverse and underserved audiences through various programmes. Museology students are trained to tailor, conceptualise and conduct such programmes to suit specific audiences and contexts.

Collaborative models and institutional synergy

Collaboration between academic institutions and museums remains key to sustainable museological practice. The department of museology at IIH has contributed as knowledge and design partner to several significant projects reflecting how research-driven inputs can shape meaningful museum outputs.

The synergy between academic institutions and museums, enabling effective implementation of museological research in live settings, will be discussed.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the need to reimagine museology education in India as a context-sensitive, practice-oriented and socially responsive discipline, rather than as a derivative of Western models. It traces the evolution of the field, outlines key structural and pedagogical challenges and presents selected examples of innovative adaptations drawn from academic and institutional practice. The discussion focuses on how locally grounded and community-engaged approaches can inform sustainable training models. In doing so, the paper aims to contribute to broader global conversations on decolonising ‘museum studies’ and rethinking museology as a collaborative, adaptive and inclusive discipline rooted in local realities and community needs.

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Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection. Reflections on a cross-institutional collaborative PhD project

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This paper reflects on my recent experience as both a PhD researcher and a curator working in collaboration with the University of Leicester and the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery (LMAG), a local-authority institution which is part of Leicester Museums & Galleries. Beyond contributing to my doctoral research, funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), this partnership allowed me to actively engage with LMAG's collections team, gaining direct access to the museum's global collection held in storage - known as the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection - and to curate the exhibition *Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection* (21 September 2024 - 9 March 2025).¹ LMAG opened in 1849 as one of the first municipal museums in the United Kingdom, while the University of Leicester was founded in 1921 as a tribute to those soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War. Despite their established history in the city, the first partnership between the institutions happened only in 2020 as part of the PhD project aimed at investigating the history of the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection.

This experience provided a valuable opportunity to foster collaborative practices between two institutions with distinct audiences and objectives. It also offered insights into how future academic research projects can benefit museums that serve diverse communities in a multicultural city. My study of LMAG's permanent global collection revealed how Leicester, despite its geographical distance from London's cultural epicentre, was deeply interconnected with various global and imperial networks of the early 20th century. While the University demonstrated its interest in reconstructing the circulation histories of the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection and therefore claimed the importance of revealing the colonial channels that allowed such global mobilisation, the Museum was concerned about the way in which academic practices could align with the needs of a public museum with a broader audience.

The Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection proved to be a unique resource for examining the circulation of global and colonial material culture, along with the histories of collecting and the role of craft-practice pedagogy in the local context. It offered original perspectives on how global collecting strategies intersected with local educational initiatives and business interests in early 20th-century Britain. By foregrounding questions of circulation, the exhibition translated academic research into a tangible experience, shedding light on the collection's connections to global and colonial histories while also exploring how educational imperatives contributed to the growth of a local business.

This paper critically evaluates the strengths and limitations of this collaborative approach. It poses key questions: what mutual benefits emerged from translating academic research into a 'real-world' outcome? What constraints prevented the much-needed co-curation of an exhibition on global crafts? What socially engaged practices were implemented to enhance public engagement with the collection? And finally, how can institutions develop long-term policies that foster sustainable collaboration between academia and museums, ensuring meaningful local impact?

¹ The online version of the exhibition can be consulted at: [Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection – Leicester Museums](#), accessed on 27 July 2025.

The formulation of the project: Exploring Leicester's colonial and global connections

The Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection is global in scope and remarkably diverse in its craftsmanship, encompassing basketry, textiles, woodwork, leatherwork and beadwork. Objects came from British, French and Belgian colonies in Africa, South-East Asia, the Pacific and Indian Ocean islands and from non-imperial contexts in central and eastern Europe and the Americas. Despite its worldwide aspect, the collection was gathered by a person who was based in Leicester but whose network of articulated global and imperial connections was significant. Harry Hardy Peach collected the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection between 1918 and 1936, with the dual scope of fostering craft-practice education while facilitating the flourishing of a local business for selling craft materials. The objects were lately donated by Peach's heirs to LMAG in 1969 as a 'school loan collection', and circulated among primary schools in Leicester and Leicestershire during the 1970s and 1980s to enhance lessons in geography and craft-making. This mobility, institutionalised by the Museum, contributed to the dispersion of some objects outside the Museum's custody. Today, while most of the collection resides permanently in the repository of the LMAG, a portion is housed within the Leicestershire County Council Museum Service, and it is possible that some items remain in private, unknown hands.



Figure 1: Dryad Basketry exhibition. © Leicester Museums & Galleries.

Peach was a businessperson, and in 1918 he inaugurated the 'Handicrafts' wing of the Dryad showroom in 42 St Nicholas Street, Leicester, next to the existing Furniture section, to sell cheap craft material to schools. Previous research on Peach has provided valuable insights into the ideological, social and cultural contexts in which the collection was formed. Pat Kirkham has examined Peach's role and networks in the formation of the Design and Industries Association (DIA) in 1915 (Kirkham, 1986). Most recently, Amy Palmer (2021) has included Peach as one of the pioneers of craft-practice education and has noted a tension between Peach's willingness to encourage crafts education in the school curriculum and the monetary return to him as a vendor of craft materials. With a focus on crafts as elements of child-centred education, Palmer emphasised the role of Dryad 'Handicrafts' in shaping the approach towards craft-practice of the Board of Education through the provision of materials to schools, which were limited until 1914.

However, such academic work has not accessed the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection at LMAG's storage, and this has limited the ability to fully contextualise the company's commercial and educational contributions within a broader framework that includes the global circulation of objects and the role played by the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection in this ambitious educational project. When the partner-

ship between LMAG and the University of Leicester started in 2020, the collection was organised in store and partially catalogued, so as to facilitate the study, which reflects the academic vogue for circulation of material culture within imperial contexts (Longair & McAleer, 2012; Wintle, 2013; Driver, Nesbitt & Cornish, 2021; Longair, 2024).

Employing object-based and archival methodologies, the research aims to reconstruct the history of the collection while exploring Leicester's global connections, thereby contributing to a redefined narrative linked to imperial collecting practices. In this context, the Museum provided invaluable support by granting access to the collection and facilitating academic research. As an outcome for a broader audience, it became evident that the most effective approach would be to engage museum visitors through an exhibition, thereby revitalising and recontextualizing the objects in store. In fact, while some objects from the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection were on display in the so-called 'world gallery' until it was dismantled in 2020, the collection was never exhibited with a standalone display by its own.

Curating the exhibition *Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection: Giving new life and light to the objects*

The exhibition *Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection* critically engages with the theme of provenance research, a topic that has recently garnered significant scholarly attention in the ongoing discourse surrounding the origins of European museum collections (Schuhmacher, 2024; van Beurden, Gondola & Lacaille, 2024).² Simultaneously, the exhibition reconstructs, in an idealised form, the Dryad 'Handicrafts' showroom of St Nicholas Street, a space where visitors could observe artifacts and purchase materials to replicate them. The display includes a prominent historical photograph from 1954, depicting the showroom window from the exterior with some items on display.

Moreover, the enduring significance of Dryad as a well-established firm in Leicester plays a pivotal role in activating memories among museum visitors, many of whom either worked for Dryad or relied on its instructional leaflets for craft education. This relationship fosters a tangible connection between individuals and objects, evoking recollections of the time when the shop was active, as four digital labels with personal memories highlighted in the exhibition demonstrate. Furthermore, the decision to exclusively exhibit baskets facilitates an exploration of the techniques and materiality inherent to these exceptional objects, whose artisanry has drawn considerable attention from visitors, as evidenced by remarks in the exhibition's comment book. In this context, it is imperative to underscore the local significance of the Dryad firm as a means of engaging a non-academic audience.

The exhibition opens by articulating its educational and collecting objectives, tracing the collection's origins to an occupational therapy initiative in which basket-making classes were offered to wounded soldiers of the First World War at Leicester's 5th Northern General Hospital, now the Fielding Johnson Building at the University of Leicester. Dryad contributed unused cane materials for this cause. This initiative laid the groundwork for the broader ambition of collecting objects globally, eventually amassing a collection of over 1,800 items. These objects were later documented in an encyclopaedic project of leaflets and booklets aimed at promoting craft-practice education. The theme of provenance research is explored through the examination of colonial agents involved in the collecting process, such as the colonial administrator Charles Hose in Sarawak, and missionary societies in Africa and Southeast Asia, as well as the collecting motivations behind Peach's travels to Germany and the United States.

Given the global reach of the collection, the failure to engage local communities in a co-curatorial or co-production project represents a notable missed opportunity, particularly considering Leicester's

2 The exhibition *ReThinking Collections*, which run between 19 January-1 December 2024 at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, was the result of the publication S. van Beurden, D. Gondola and A. Lacaille, 2023: [ReThinking Collections | Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale - Tervuren - Belgique](#), accessed on 27 July 2025.

multicultural demographic. Such a people-centred approach to curation was not feasible within the constraints of the exhibition timeline, which limited the possibility of building the necessary trust between curators, museum staff, and local communities. This represents a gap that could be addressed in future partnership projects between the University of Leicester and its most prominent Museum, and with a specific museum policy which poses attention to developing such relations.

Engaging audiences: developing a socially engaged programme

A socially engaged programme, developed in tandem with the exhibition, has been made possible through a short fellowship awarded by The University of Leicester's Centre for Regional and Local History. The programme seeks to enhance the exhibition's visibility by curating events tailored to a diverse audience. This initiative includes a talk as part of the Autumn Seminar Series 2024, organised by the Centre for Regional and Local History and the Centre for Urban History, as well as guided tours of the exhibition conducted by master's students from the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies. Additionally, the programme involves collaboration with the University's Heritage Hub, basket-makers from City Lit in London, and the Leicester-based Architecture and Design Group. Handling sessions with Dryad leaflets are also organised within the exhibition gallery, alongside sessions in the Museum's deposit, where people could look closely to some of the Dryad 'Handicrafts' wooden objects.

The collaboration with the School of Museum Studies is of particular significance, as it opens new avenues for examining the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection in the context of academic programming and future project development. Doctoral research on this collection has revealed its considerable local relevance and has highlighted the potential for analysing the collection from diverse perspectives. This insight affirms the collection's rich value not only as an object of study but also as a medium for scholarly inquiry across disciplines, ranging from history to anthropology, craft-practice education and museum curation.

From 2023 to 2025, I have worked alongside the teaching team to develop a university module centred on the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection. Initially contributing as a teaching assistant for the 'Heritage Specialisms' module (2023), I later took on the role of guest lecturer in the 'Engaging Audiences' module (2024 and 2025). In 2025, students co-curated an exhibition that draws upon objects from the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection. Their work weaves a narrative that encompasses the collection's imperial origins, the artistic techniques it embodies, and the mental well-being benefits associated with craft-making. This exhibition, set in the University's David Wilson Library and held in dialogue with the larger *Dryad Basketry: A Global Collection* at the LMAG, represents a tangible outcome of this academic collaboration. It is hoped that this partnership will continue to evolve, laying the groundwork for a more formalized and sustained relationship between the two educational institutions.

Conclusion

This paper explores the inaugural collaboration between the University of Leicester and the city's local-authority museum, identifying both achievements and areas for development to inform future partnerships. Notable successes include the curation of an exhibition that, for the first time, brought previously stored objects into public view, as well as the active involvement of master's students from the School of Museum Studies in practical work with the collection. Challenges remain, particularly regarding curatorial approaches and the need to incorporate the voices of basket-making communities with direct knowledge of artistic techniques. Overall, the collaboration yielded significant academic and museological outcomes, while opening new avenues for co-produced research and interpretation centred on the Dryad 'Handicrafts' collection and its multifaceted potential for exploration.

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From object to experience: The mounting of artifacts and the act of care at the Grand Egyptian Museum

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In recent decades, museums have undergone a paradigmatic transformation – from static repositories of objects to dynamic institutions of care, engagement, and ethical stewardship. As Message (2018) argues, the “social turn” in museology increasingly positions museums as active participants in community empowerment and reconciliation. Within this framework, the act of collecting itself has been redefined as a form of care, not only for the objects but also for the cultures and communities they represent (Lonetree, 2012). At the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), this shift is reflected in the often-unseen but critical work of the Mounting Laboratory. Traditionally seen as a technical or logistical domain, mounting is reinterpreted here as a vital museological practice – one that engages with material conservation, ethical display, community participation, and the transmission of cultural meaning. This paper examines the ways in which the mounting lab at GEM contributes to the museum’s broader mission of connecting people to heritage through responsible and thoughtful exhibition practices.

Reframing mounting as a practice of care

Mounting has long been viewed as a technical support activity focused on the physical stabilization of objects. Yet, as Ashley-Smith (1999) articulates, the treatment and presentation of museum objects must be understood as risk-management decisions that are inherently ethical. At GEM, mounts are more than supports; they are interpretive tools that mediate between the object, the exhibit space, and the audience. Each mount is custom designed, responding to the object’s physical vulnerabilities, curatorial vision, and the visitor’s experiential path. This expanded understanding reframes mounting as a form of museological care – one that acknowledges the material needs of the artifact while respecting its historical and cultural integrity. For instance, when displaying fragile textiles, organic remains, or gilded surfaces, the mounting lab collaborates closely with conservators to minimize stress points and with curators to maintain the intended meaning and aura of the object.

Collaborative methods and shared authority

At the core of GEM’s mounting practice is collaboration. Simpson (2001) emphasizes that contemporary museums must move beyond authoritative narratives and embrace pluralistic, inclusive dialogues. The mounting process embodies this ideal, requiring input from a spectrum of museum professionals: conservators, curators, exhibition designers, and mount makers. This collective approach ensures that decisions about object placement, visibility, and stability are not only technically sound but also ethically grounded and interpretively rich. For example, the development of mounts for the Middle Kingdom model figures involved numerous rounds of discussion and prototyping to address conservation needs while preserving the narrative cohesion of funerary scenes. Mounting in this case was a curatorial decision, a conservation strategy, and a narrative choice – all shaped through collaborative dialogue. Furthermore, as Peers and Brown (2003) highlight, collaboration must also extend beyond the museum to include source communities. While GEM’s collections are largely national, the involvement of local

scholars, craftspeople, and cultural stakeholders in the mounting process ensures sensitivity to living traditions and cultural perspectives.

Ethical dimensions: Preservation and access

The work of mounting is inherently tied to ethical questions about access and authority. How can we balance the imperative to preserve fragile heritage with the need to make it accessible, legible, and meaningful to diverse audiences? Tythacott and Arvanitis (2014) remind us that exhibitions are not neutral: they frame relationships between viewers and cultures, often reinscribing hierarchies of power. At GEM, mounting decisions are made with a conscious effort to democratize the viewing experience. Display height, angle, lighting, and even the reflectivity of materials are considered to ensure accessibility for all visitors, including children and individuals with disabilities. In mounting royal statues, for example, careful attention is given not to overly elevate objects in a way that alienates viewers from their human scale. Moreover, materials used in mounting – especially metals like stainless steel – are chosen not only for durability but for their neutrality and reversibility, reflecting an ethical commitment to non-intrusiveness and future adaptability (Ashley-Smith, 1999).

Mounting and the politics of display

Museums do not just exhibit objects; they frame narratives. How an artifact is displayed can assert or challenge dominant interpretations. At GEM, the mounting lab participates in this narrative construction, working closely with curators to design supports that reinforce inclusive and historically grounded storytelling. Lonetree (2012) argues that museums must reckon with the colonial histories embedded in their collections. Though GEM is a national institution, it is not isolated from these debates, particularly given Egypt's centrality to global archaeological history. In this context, mounting becomes a political act – one that can either reinforce or question institutional authority. For example, the decision to mount repatriated artifacts in a way that emphasizes their provenance and cultural journey signals GEM's commitment to transparency and historical continuity.

Training, innovation, and future directions

The mounting lab at GEM is not only a site of care but also of innovation. Mount makers are trained in conservation science, 3D modeling, mechanical engineering, and museology. This multifaceted expertise enables the development of mounting systems that are technically precise and culturally sensitive. For example, in collaboration with conservation teams, the lab has developed modular mounts that accommodate fluctuating environmental conditions, reducing the need for rehandling sensitive objects. This aligns with Message's (2018) call for museums to reimagine their professional practices as forms of social responsibility. The mounting lab is thus not merely a technical unit but a contributor to the museum's ethical and educational mission.

Conclusion

The evolving role of museums demands an evolving understanding of museum work. Mounting, often hidden from public view, emerges at the Grand Egyptian Museum as a central practice of care – care for the object, care for the story it tells, and care for the people who engage with it. By embedding ethical reflection, collaborative decision-making, and cultural sensitivity into each mount, the GEM mounting lab exemplifies the museum's commitment to building relationships rather than merely preserving artifacts. In an era where the museum is being redefined as a space of dialogue, accountability, and connection, mounting is no longer a background operation – it is part of the museum's voice.

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The reverberation of the museum: What's missing in Mexican museum training programs?

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The Santiago Round Table marked a turning point in Latin American museology by proposing a deep transformation of the museum's role. Held amid global and regional crises, it advocated for a socially and politically engaged museology that addressed the specific needs of the Global South (Mellado, 2022).

This was a pivotal moment in museology that redefined museums as socially engaged institutions tied to their communities, heritage, and territories. Critiquing traditional museums as colonial and nationalistic, it highlights the museum with an “integrated museum” model, which prioritizes education, interdisciplinary collaboration, and transformative action turning museums into dynamic spaces of critical memory and social change. Despite setbacks from 20th-century authoritarianism, the Roundtable's ideals resurfaced in later movements like new museology (e.g., ecomuseums and la Casa del Museo) and UNESCO's 2015 reaffirmation of museums as tools for social cohesion (Bize Vivanco, 2022).

This Latin American vision of the museum influenced global museological currents. According to van Mensch and Meijer van Mensch (2015), new trends in contemporary museums embrace participatory, decolonial, and sustainable practices, all of this rooted in the Santiago Declaration's vision of museums as catalysts for community empowerment and structural change of the museum institution.

According to Pérez Castellanos (2022), the idea of the “integral museum” (*museo integral*) model promoted after the Santiago Roundtable prioritized holistic cultural participation through four dimensions: access/enjoyment (breaking institutional barriers), production (co-creating exhibitions with communities), representation (centering local narratives), and decision-making power (shifting authority to residents). This meaningful social engagement requires museums to cede power, embrace long-term dialogue, and move beyond symbolic inclusion – lessons critical for contemporary debates on equity and representation in cultural institutions.

The questions that arise from this are *How do museum [training programs] incorporate critical, social, and participatory museological principles [in their curricula]? In what ways do museum training programs seek to promote a reorientation of the museological principles through diverse political-museological scenarios rooted in political agency, community empowerment, and intercultural dialogue with marginalized communities? How do museum training programs promote the museums as political institutions whose social function oscillates between preservation, democratization, and decolonial inclusion – urging a critical, context-sensitive reevaluation of their cultural agency?*”

The Ulm Model

On the other hand, and several years before the Santiago Round Table, is the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm 1953–1968) that was a forward-looking institution for teaching design that gained international recognition for its multidisciplinary and holistic approach to design education, blending interdisciplinary theory, industrial collaboration, and social responsibility. Founded by Inge Scholl, Ott

Aicher, and Max Bill, the school rejected the notion of designers as mere artists, instead framing them as coordinators of complex systems (Short, 2021). Its curriculum – later termed the Ulm Model – integrated science, technology, and ethics, emphasizing long-lasting functionality, resource efficiency, and equitable solutions, foreshadowing modern sustainable design principles (Short, 2021). According to Short, for Tomás Maldonado design had to address ecological and social imbalances, critiquing unchecked consumerism and planned obsolescence decades before these topics entered mainstream discourse, and addressing that, for the Ulmer, sustainability should not be just considered in ecological terms but stress the notion of “a social sustainability” (Short, 2021, p. 348).

To Short, Ulm’s philosophy highlights systems thinking (e.g., modular architecture, circular economies), social equity (design for public needs over profit), and behavioral change (cultivating responsible consumption) – values now central to movements like cradle-to-cradle design and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, that share with contemporary sustainable design principles established foundations for today’s sustainable design discourse.

Finally, Short concludes that the HfG Ulm’s legacy offers a blueprint for sustainable design practice, advocating for its reintegration into modern education. By treating sustainability not as an add-on but as inherent to design’s purpose, the Ulm Model challenges designers to materialize preferable futures (Short, 2021). In that sense, it is possible to adopt Ulm’s holistic vision for museum training programs where design of museum spaces and exhibitions transcends aesthetics to become a transformative force for environmental and social resilience.

Museum training in Mexico remains overly technical and inward-looking

In Mexico, the development of museology and museography education took place primarily through the lens of two key institutions: the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH) and the Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía (ENCRyM). The ENAH pioneered formal training in museography as early as 1942, offering a curriculum that blended anthropology, art history, and practical exhibition design – a progressive approach for its time (Vázquez Olvera, 2017). However, the program was short-lived; bureaucratic oversights and limited professional opportunities led to its discontinuation, as the ENAH deemed it impractical to sustain “if there was nowhere to work” (Vázquez Olvera, 2017, p.10). Despite its brief existence, this initiative positioned Mexico as a regional innovator in museographic practice, driven by figures like Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla and Miguel Covarrubias, whose work at mid-20th-century exhibitions impressed international peers (Vázquez Olvera, 2017).

The ENCRyM later emerged as the focal point for specialized training, yet the legacy of centralization persisted. As Vázquez Olvera (2017) notes, efforts to decentralize museology education remained limited, with programs still concentrated in Mexico City. This historical trajectory underscores a tension between Mexico’s pioneering role in developing museographic theory and the structural challenges that hindered its long-term institutionalization.

The ENCRyM developed specialized programs including the Master in Museology and Specialty in Museography, alongside international courses organized through collaborations with UNESCO and the OEA (Vázquez Olvera, 2017). Among these, the “Curso Interamericano de Capacitación Museográfica” (1972–1978) exemplified this approach: professionalizing as a practice centered on exhibition production, conservation, and management that prioritized hands-on training in conservation and museum management (Witker Barra, 2015). Designed as intensive nine-month theoretical-practical trainings, these OEA courses prioritized hands-on learning and attracted professionals across Latin America (Vázquez Olvera, 2017).

As Witker Barra (2015) documents, the program’s curriculum emphasized practical skills, with the museographic project as the core function of the lead museographer that integrated design, installation,

and preservation techniques. However, as Vázquez Olvera (2017) critically notes, this professionalization came at the cost of the field's original anthropological foundations: contemporary curricula increasingly emphasized technical skills while diminishing “the anthropological framework of the institution that gave rise to it” (pp. 20-21). This shift was exacerbated by the institutional separation between ENCRyM and ENAH, which limited interdisciplinary exchange and community-oriented approaches (Vázquez Olvera, 2017).

Witker Barra and Vázquez Olvera conclude by identifying persistent challenges, including urban-centralized education, insufficient research on museology's societal role, and a disconnect between academic training and real-world museum needs. While acknowledging the achievements of these institutions, the authors call for a renewed focus on interdisciplinary collaboration, decentralized training, and stronger ties to local communities to ensure museology's relevance in preserving and democratizing Mexico's cultural heritage.

Witker Barra calls for a curriculum that engage all stakeholders – employers, practitioners, and communities – while adapting to new typologies like interactive and critical museography. He highlights Mexico's unique contributions to museography pedagogy while underscoring the need for systemic alignment between education, institutional priorities, and evolving museum practices.

Current landscape of museum training in Mexico

This study employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach to analyze the current state of museology and museography education in Mexico, focusing on its alignment with contemporary demands for interdisciplinarity, audience engagement, and social relevance. A systematic review of programs (ENCRyM, UNAM, INBA, etc.) was conducted to identify strengths, gaps, and pedagogical trends. Programs were evaluated based on integration of community engagement, sustainability, and digital mediation, balance between theoretical frameworks and applied skills, and alignment with global shifts in museology.

In addition, online questionnaires were distributed to alumni of selected programs, featuring open-ended questions such as: “How has your institution helped you develop strategies for community engagement or audience development?”, “Without reading ICOM's definition, what is a museum to you? Why?”, “What do you think is the social function of a museum?” Responses were analyzed through thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in graduates' perceptions of institutional preparedness and societal roles.

According to this study, it was found there is one diploma in Museography: Design and Production of Exhibitions offered by University Centro; one Specialized Technical Career in Museography and Restoration Assistant offered by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México for its high school students; one diploma in Curatorship, Museography and Exhibition Management offered by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; one Postgraduate Specialty Program in Museography offered by ENCRyM; and one Postgraduate Master's Program in Museum Studies offered by ENCRyM – all offered in Mexico City – and only one National Museum Training and Updating Program offered by Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes Literatura in four regional circuits across the country.

All of these programs are currently characterized by a strong technical and object-centered approach, with notable strengths in heritage conservation and exhibition production. Institutions like ENCRyM offer specialized programs that provide rigorous training in collection management, conservation techniques, and traditional exhibition design. However, these programs often prioritize institutional frameworks over community engagement, with limited emphasis on participatory methodologies or decolonial approaches to curation. While they produce skilled professionals in artifact preservation, the curricula rarely address contemporary challenges like digital mediation, sustainability, or inclusive storytelling.

Complementary courses, such as UNAM's Técnico en Auxiliar Museógrafo and INBA's Curso en Museografía, focus on practical skills like mounting exhibitions and handling collections. These programs excel in technical execution but tend to operate in disciplinary silos, separating museology from design, technology, and social sciences. For instance, while students learn to construct displays, they receive minimal training in digital tools or sustainable practices. This gap limits graduates' ability to innovate in an era where museums increasingly serve as platforms for social dialogue and environmental advocacy.

Meanwhile, short-term and continuing education programs, such as those offered by UNAM's Faculty of Arts and Design or Centro, introduce more contemporary themes like curatorial theory and interactive design. However, these courses often lack depth in systemic thinking or interdisciplinary collaboration – key principles of modern museology. The result is a fragmented educational landscape where technical proficiency is emphasized over holistic problem-solving. Without integrating sustainability, digital literacy, and community co-creation into core curricula, Mexican museology programs risk falling behind global shifts toward more adaptive, audience-centered museum practices.

The limitations on this study are that it was limited to graduates with accessible contact information, potentially excluding voices from all programs. In addition to that, programs evolve; curricula reviewed may not reflect recent updates, and graduate experiences may not represent current pedagogical approaches. Also, due to time and resources limitations, there is an absence of statistical metrics (e.g., employment rates, project outcomes) that limits the ability to correlate curricula with professional efficacy. Therefore, findings reflect specific institutional contexts and cannot be uniformly applied to all Mexican museology education.

Despite the above, according to the results obtained, it can be stated that museum education in Mexico must move beyond spatial or exhibition concerns and embrace a community-centered, interdisciplinary model where design of museum spaces and exhibitions transcends aesthetics to become a transformative force for environmental and social resilience.

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Museology and Indigenous languages: A call to action

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In Latin America, 8% of the total population identifies as Indigenous, accounting for 52 million members of 826 ethnic groups who speak 550 native languages (FILAC, 2020). Language is one of the pillars on which culture is sustained, serving as the vehicle for the acquisition and transmission of the Indigenous worldview, knowledge, and cultural values (AIDPI, 1995). Language is a key determinant of cultural identity because it provides cohesion and legitimacy to the community and a sense of cultural belonging to the nation or the ethnic group to which one belongs (Morales, 2008). In Guatemala, the Peace Agreements of 1996 recognized the identity and rights of four national cultures: Maya (42%), Xinka (2%), Garifuna (0.5%) and the non-Indigenous or Ladino population (56%) as accounted for in the National Population Census of 2018.

Indigenous languages all around the world are losing their vitality and at least a quarter of them are severely endangered and at risk of disappearing. The United Nations General Assembly (Resolution A/RES/74/135) proclaimed the period between 2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032), to draw global attention on the critical situation of many Indigenous languages and to mobilize stakeholders and resources for their preservation, revitalization and promotion. Museums are called to assume their responsibility, though implementation has met with considerable challenges and resistance.

In 2024, the Guatemalan Museum Association and National ICOM-Committee (AMG-ICOM Guatemala) implemented an ICOM-SAREC supported project to protect, promote and revitalize Indigenous languages in museums. As Secretary of AMG-ICOM Guatemala Board, I coordinated the project. As a speaker at the 27th, 28th and 31st ICOFOM LAM Regional Meetings, I am an advocate for community museums and the inclusion of Indigenous languages in museology to strengthen cultural identity and defend the rights of Indigenous peoples (Vanheusden, 2020, 2021).

Assessing Indigenous voices in museums

In Guatemala, Spanish is the dominant official language, but the National Languages Law of 2003 mandates that the educational system and public services respect, promote, develop and use the 22 Mayan languages as well as the Xinka and Garifuna languages in service delivery. Each region of the country belongs to a specific linguistic community, which defines the Indigenous language used as a first or second language. The project adopted a broad concept of language, including not only verbal expressions – such as literature, songs, rituals, and oral narratives – but also nonverbal semiotic systems manifested in paintings, textiles, ceramics, and other artifacts and expressions.

The research component of the ICOM-SAREC project was carried out in 82 museums, representing approximately 50% of the museums in Guatemala and covering 16 of the 24 linguistic communities. The first phase was conducted on-site in 19 museums, providing data on the language skills of museum staff. Of the 19 professionals surveyed, three identified themselves as Mayan, two as Xinka, and 14 as Ladino or non-Indigenous. Only the three Mayan professionals spoke an Indigenous language. Twenty-six percent of professionals did not know which linguistic community their museum belonged to.

Thirty-two percent had attended classes to learn an Indigenous language: the three Mayan, two Xinka, and only one of the 14 Ladinos. The limited linguistic competence of professionals reflects resistance within the educational system and universities to prioritize – or even include – Indigenous languages in the curriculum. For example, the Language School of the Public University of San Carlos, CALUSAC, offers 25 levels of Mandarin and Hebrew, but not a single level of Xinka or Maya Poqomam.

Regarding other language-related capacities, 74% of professionals affirmed having read the Mayan “Bible,” *Popol Wuj*, which is a required text in primary schools. They have read it in Spanish, as it is not available in most of the 22 Mayan languages, even though *Popol Wuj* has been translated into more than 10 foreign languages. Seventy-four percent of respondents have practiced traditional crafts, mainly pottery. Sixty-eight percent indicated that they could perform a traditional dance, such as dancing to the national instrument, the marimba. The same proportion reported having participated in an Indigenous ceremony and being familiar with Mayan glyph writing. Fifty-eight percent affirmed basic knowledge of signs and figures represented in Indigenous textiles. The lowest levels of competence were in understanding the Mayan vigesimal numerical system (57%) and comprehending the Mayan calendars (37%). The average score on cultural competences is 56%.

In addition, the research team observed that the competence of the professionals who responded affirmatively was, in most cases, limited to basic learning outcomes of the primary or middle school curriculum and did not meet the level expected of a museum professional. This not only reflects insufficient training among museum professionals but also underscores systemic shortcomings in the education system’s approach to Indigenous culture. Furthermore, it supports Cojti’s (2019) assertion that public policies and programs have been ineffective in protecting, promoting, and revitalizing Indigenous languages.

It is important to note that museums were hesitant or resistant to participate in the on-site research. The team encountered challenges in obtaining approval from museum directors to conduct visits and the questionnaire often made professionals uncomfortable, as it exposed limited capacities related to Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge. To improve participation, the project team restructured the survey and shifted to an online format, ultimately enabling data collection from 82 museums.

Of the 82 museums surveyed, 38 (46%) reported using English in addition to Spanish in their texts or tours, while only 16 museums (19%) use an Indigenous language, as mandated by law. A total of 56 museums – 70% of which display artifacts related to Indigenous culture – responded to the questions concerning intercultural practices; 19 via on-site interviews and 37 through online responses. Forty-eight percent of museums reported including traditional music or dance and 30% include Indigenous textiles in their museography. Topics essential to understanding Indigenous cultures and their contribution to world heritage received the lowest scores: only 29% use the Mayan calendar, 23% make reference to the *Popol Wuj* and Mayan glyph writing in their narratives; and just 18% make use of Mayan numerals. The average score of these cultural practices was only 30% among the 56 museums that responded to this part of the questionnaire. This figure is probably even lower, considering that 26 of the 82 surveyed museums declined to answer these questions, claiming the topics were outside the scope of their institutional purpose, even though eight of them display objects related to Indigenous culture.

Although these results are not conclusive, they suggest that Guatemalan museums tend to focus mainly on the display of objects without providing adequate context and interpretation. This represents not only a missed opportunity but also a failure of institutional responsibility to foster understanding and respect for Indigenous culture and language.

A new framework for Latin American museology

The research findings provide quantitative data that support the awareness among museologists (Anderson et al., 2018) that museums prioritize the conservation and display of Indigenous objects without

adequately contextualizing their cultural significance – favoring a culturally elitist representation that fails to consider the cultural dynamics of local communities and perpetuates the invisibility of their traditions and knowledge. Xón (2024) and Moreno (2015) found that Latin American museology tends to view Indigenous cultures from the perspective of “the exotic” or “the other,” rather than integrating them as part of the national identity. Revisiting *Latin American museum theory* (Escudero, 2019), there is little or no reference to the relevance of Indigenous languages in museology. However, awareness is rising in the literature about the need to transform museums into open, reflective, and inclusive institutions that recognize and promote cultural diversity and the rights of Indigenous peoples. The new museum definition of ICOM exhorts museums to enable communities to participate in constructing their own cultural representations. Mithlo (2020) is a strong advocate for valuing Indigenous expressions and curatorial practices in modern art. The International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) follows this same line of action, advocating for the transformation of museums into inclusive spaces where Indigenous cultures and their heritage are valued and fairly presented (Brown et al., 2022). The data of the Guatemalan Survey suggest that there is still a long way to go – and that training museum staff is a fundamental step toward achieving this goal.

A call to action

The project implemented a training program that created a participatory space with local experts to explore opportunities and develop techniques to protect, promote and revitalize Indigenous languages in museums. The program demonstrated the importance of the National ICOM Committee in raising awareness and bringing together 94 museum professionals during eight virtual monthly sessions. It was an intensive effort to share knowledge and experiences, and it provided the opportunity to develop an educational toolkit in two Indigenous languages to introduce basic knowledge on the Mayan language, numbers and hieroglyphs, and to use extracts of *Popol Wuj* in interpreting Mayan values and worldview. The toolbox was validated with more than 2,000 students and it challenges museums to contextualize and label collections in the native language, within the appropriate ethnic background and historical moment, and using the Mayan calendar. The project highlights the importance of progressive, multi-disciplinary collaboration and training museum staff to foster inclusive and participatory cultural heritage management with the ethnic and linguistic communities that gave origin and significance to the museum collections. Community museums, managed by the local ethnic community, using the native language in interpretation, represent an important alternative to protect cultural heritage and promote and revitalize Indigenous languages.

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Le Musée acteur écoresponsable : Comment concilier valeurs professionnelles et approches écologiques ?

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L'approche durable érige, désormais, l'ensemble de la communauté professionnelle des musées en garant des ressources indispensables à la préservation du patrimoine et conscient de son impact environnemental.

Comment, face à ces changements souvent sources d'injonctions contradictoires, les professionnels sont-ils conduits à faire évoluer leurs référentiels, à repenser leurs métiers au quotidien mais aussi les valeurs et missions des musées ? nous nous appuyerons sur quelques exemples de l'engagement concret des grands musées français¹ pour illustrer ce changement de paradigme.

Un musée durable en mutation

Crises écologiques et enjeux sociétaux modifient en profondeur le cadre éthique du musée. Ce bouleversement s'est traduit dans l'évolution de la définition internationale de ses missions en 2022. Il nourrit désormais les projets scientifiques et culturels (PSC) de nombreux établissements, leur programmation, la politique des collections, le fonctionnement quotidien des établissements, les échanges des musées avec leur partenaires emprunteurs, artistes, scientifiques, tutelles, financeurs, professionnels (scénographes, restaurateurs, transporteurs, assureurs) ou encore leur rapport aux publics.

La notion de « durabilité » éclaire de façon inédite le modèle du musée et les enjeux de préservation du patrimoine. Mais, comment concilier conservation des collections et durabilité ? identifier les leviers et reconnaître les freins ? orienter les pratiques vers une conservation plus sobre ? Quelles cartes jouer pour faire du musée un acteur engagé de ce renversement de la méthode ?

L'économiste Serge Latouche fustige la démarche d'accumulation de nos sociétés et en creux celle des musées². Il interroge ainsi ce qui fonde leur ADN : leur politique d'acquisition et d'enrichissement tout autant que leur rayonnement au travers des prêts et des expositions.

En imposant sa logique de réduction des impacts et une plus grande sobriété dans les pratiques de conservation, l'éco-transition instaure un nouveau rapport aux valeurs prônées par le musée « conservatoire ». Dans ce contexte les normes de climat communément admises tendent à s'assouplir et les pratiques architecturales évoluent vers plus de frugalité et une meilleure adaptation. Revisiter les normes acquises et les adapter aux nouvelles contraintes imposées par le changement climatique, favoriser le

1 Citons entre autres le musée du Louvre, le musée du quai Branly, le musée d'Orsay ou encore le Centre Pompidou.

2 Latouche, S. (2019). *La décroissance*, Que Sais-je ? Le musée dans ses missions fondamentales – acquérir, conserver et diffuser – peut-il survivre à la crise climatique ? Quelles sont ses capacités d'adaptation et de résilience ? Quelques exemples d'une approche systémique de la question permettent de considérer que cette exigence peut être en partie remplie, comme par exemple au Palais des Beaux-arts de Lille (cf. Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille. (2021). *Guide pratique d'écoconception*. Consulté le 16 septembre 2025. <https://pba.lille.fr/content/download/6166/71045/file/GUIDE+PRATIQUE+D%E2%80%99C3%89COCONCEPTION.pdf>).

réemploi du bâti, les pratiques innovantes, la sobriété de la construction sont aujourd'hui à l'œuvre. De même, la conception des expositions et les règles en matière de prêts opèrent leur mue. Pas sans difficulté certes; pas sans quelques renoncements parfois, mais avec toujours beaucoup d'intelligence collective.

De questionnements en questionnements, une nouvelle carte des musées émerge au grès des innovations qui témoignent de l'engagement de ses acteurs.

Mais face à ces défis, quels sont les freins et les leviers pour amorcer puis implanter un « musée durable » et faire émerger une éco-gestion des collections ? Comment faire éclore puis fructifier les conditions d'un écosystème muséal plus soutenable ? Quels sont les leviers pour produire mieux avec moins ? Comment *in fine* inventer une politique pro-active des collections et embarquer tous les acteurs du musée?

Ecologiser le musée : Greener option first !

L'approche durable érige, désormais, l'ensemble de la communauté professionnelle en garant des ressources indispensables à la préservation du patrimoine conscient de son impact environnemental.

Réduction de la consommation énergétique et développement d'outils d'analyse et de mesure, diminution des impacts environnementaux en matière de régie des œuvres, recours à des matériaux biosourcés, réflexion sur l'éco-production des expositions temporaires, engagement pour un numérique plus sobre, pratiques d'achats publics plus durables, politiques d'acquisitions raisonnées sont autant de signes d'une mutation professionnelle en marche³.

Ces questions amènent naturellement à se poser celle d'un possible *low museum*, engagé dans une rationalisation de ses collections et de ses espaces, conscient de ses forces et de ses faiblesses, vigilant en matière d'acquisition et de mobilisation de ressources, un musée qui aurait fait le pas de côté lui permettant de penser autrement ses missions sans y renoncer pour autant.

L'art d'accommoder les restes

Ce changement de paradigme se perçoit à différentes échelles, internationales, création du comité international ICOM SUSTAIN, ou locales avec des exemples inspirants qui permettent de décentrer notre regard pour tenter de concilier créativité et responsabilité⁴.

Cette injonction à changer de modèle exacerbe le hiatus entre le « boom » muséal des années 1990-2000 avec son corolaire de phénomène de surtourisme et le ralentissement, voire la décroissance, imposés par la situation présente. Les « 8 R » définis par Latouche – reconceptualiser, relocaliser, redistribuer, recycler, réutiliser, restructurer, réévaluer, réduire⁵ – trouvent ici naturellement leur place.

La course à la fréquentation, la globalisation des échanges de prêts d'œuvres, les stratégies de marque développées par les grands établissements muséaux et qui visent à générer des recettes propres et de la visibilité sur le plan international, sont autant de contradictions potentielles avec la recherche d'un développement soutenable et d'une plus grande sobriété.

Dans ce contexte la conception et la mise en œuvre des expositions temporaires est amplement questionnée, passée au tamis d'outils d'analyse de cycle de vie, décortiquée dans son impact logistique notamment en termes de mobilité des œuvres.

3 Congrès d'ICOM France, journée professionnelle, « Penser le musée de demain. La décroissance en questions », 27 septembre 2024.

4 L'approche systémique du développement durable au Palais des Beaux-arts de Lille relève de cette approche.

5 Latouche, S. (2015). Une société de décroissance est-elle souhaitable ?, *Revue juridique de l'environnement*, 40 (2), 201-208.

La pratique du réemploi se trouve même placée au centre du projet de l'Exposition, de sa construction comme au Louvre-Lens ou à Universcience⁶.

Cette exigence éco-responsable bouleverse donc les pratiques des professionnels du patrimoine : de manière emblématique, les métiers de la conservation se reconfigurent du fait de la remise en question des normes communément admises en conservation et des usages en matière de gestion des collections. Les réserves des musées cristallisent ces enjeux comme espaces où « appliqués ensemble, les principes qui [...] règnent rendent possible la préservation à la fois de notre monde et de notre patrimoine culturel »⁷. En se constituant comme des centres de conservation dédiés à la préservation et à l'étude des œuvres, les réserves émergent comme un autre cœur battant du musée et se trouvent ainsi l'un des pivots de la reconfiguration de l'écosystème muséal, de la redéfinition des rapports aux collections et des missions des professionnels⁸. Le Centre de conservation du Louvre à Liévin, qui regroupe aujourd'hui à 200 kilomètres de Paris l'ensemble des collections du musée, est un très bel exemple de durabilité par son ambition architecture et son intégration de pratiques durables au quotidien⁹. Une politique de soin responsable des collections se met en place.

Ce changement d'approche éprouve notre capacité d'adaptation, modifie nos comportements et nos usages tant sur le plan stratégique qu'opérationnel. Il nous incite, par la confrontation avec nos contradictions, à tendre vers plus de sobriété, à devenir plus résilients dans nos pratiques à rentrer dans un processus de gestion durable des collections. Le passage à une logique circulaire permet une consommation plus sobre, la prévention du gaspillage de matériaux et la réduction des déchets. Cette logique répond ainsi aux attentes fortes des équipes de conservation, restauration et régie¹⁰ : tri, réemploi, nouveaux matériaux et construction d'outils d'amélioration continue.

Le développement des circuits courts dans le domaine de la régie, la valorisation des métiers d'art, la construction d'outils d'évaluation et de mesure communs, le développement de filières locales de conservation-restauration ainsi que les programmes de recherche en conservation préventive constituent ainsi de réels enjeux pour les années à venir.

Post-préservation ?

L'écoresponsabilité est désormais une valeur partagée par tous les acteurs du secteur, au point d'être parfois l'objectif structurant des politiques patrimoniales. Elle concerne toutes les filières et tous les métiers engagés dans une mutation globale mais néanmoins traversés de contradictions profondes entre acquisitions et accumulation des collections, conservation et durabilité, créativité et sobriété.

Cette transformation en cours replace l'humain au centre des pratiques patrimoniales. La conservation est le lieu par excellence de la (re)conciliation par l'adaptation des normes, des usages et des pratiques. Elle est cœur des transitions contemporaines.

6 Cité des Sciences/ Universcience. (2009). Guide d'écoconception des expositions. Consulté le 16 septembre 2025. <https://www.calameo.com/read/0000001321b615e10bafc>

7 De Bruyn, E. (2020). La réserve durable, un modèle de réflexion pour la gestion des petites institutions culturelles, Cahiers de l'Araafu, 36, 87-105.

8 Hénaut, L. & Vassal, H. (2024). Les réserves en débat : collections, organisations et dynamiques professionnelles. Dans Beltrame, T. N. & Kreplak, Y. (dir.) Les réserves des musées – Écologies des collections (pp.61-82), Presses du réel.

9 Marguerite, M.-L. & Vassal H. (2024). La réserve externalisée, levier de développement durable ? dans Museum International (pp.124-135), 75 (297-300).

10 On se référera ici à l'étude conjointe menée par les associations de l'AFROA, l'APREUVU et la FFCR en 2023-2024 : Consulté le 9 septembre 2025. <https://aprevu.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/resultat-denquete-afroa-ccraprevu-compressed.pdf>

L'écologie des collections est un engagement collectif sur le temps long qui repose en permanence sur la recherche d'un compromis « entre ce qui est socialement souhaitable, économiquement rentable, techniquement réalisable, écologiquement acceptable et culturellement viable »¹¹.

En cela elle est aussi un puissant « *potential driving factor* »¹² que l'engagement pris par les grands établissements manifeste. À ce titre la démarche entreprise par le musée du Louvre dès 2010 puis amplifiée récemment dans le cadre du déploiement de son plan d'écologie patrimoniale est particulièrement significative.

Engagé dans une démarche RSO (Responsabilité Sociétale des Organisations) depuis une dizaine d'années et dans un ambitieux programme de réduction de ses consommations énergétiques depuis 2020, l'Établissement Public du Musée du Louvre (EPML) souhaite désormais que l'écologie patrimoniale innerve chacune de ses actions, qu'elles concernent les publics, les collections, le domaine ou les équipes tout en amplifiant sa démarche d'inclusion sociale. Ce plan se fonde sur la mobilisation volontaire de 200 agents du musée.

De même l'enthousiasme des musées à conduire la réalisation de bilans carbone relève de cette motivation pour parvenir à obtenir des données concrètes et chiffrées qui posent les grands ordres de grandeur d'émissions de gaz à effets de serre (GES) en fonction des champs d'activité, afin de donner un axe plus rigoureux, construit, voire scientifique à l'ensemble de la démarche RSO¹³

Un levier d'expérimentation et de redirection

Dans ce contexte, la « mue » écologique des grands directeurs d'institutions culturelles, leur changement d'approche possède une influence déterminante¹⁴.

Qu'il s'agisse du musée du Louvre, d'Universcience, du musée d'Orsay ou encore du musée du quai Branly ou de l'établissement Paris-Musées, tous insistent sur la dimension transformative du sujet, levier d'accompagnement et de (re)conciliation de pratiques pour apprendre à faire autrement tout en préservant la qualité du PSC. En France on retiendra et on saluera la force du collectif et des propositions portées par les agents eux-mêmes et relayées par les réseaux associatifs à la force émancipatrice¹⁵.

Désormais s'impose l'urgence à fixer une limite planétaire et non plus seulement économique en questionnant, à des échelles différentes, le coût écologique et économique du patrimoine et les conditions de sa soutenabilité à long terme.

11 Viel, A. (2011). « Une muséodiversité au cœur d'un développement durable », dans Chaumier S. & Porcedda, A. (dir.), *Musées et développement durable*, La Documentation française, coll. « Musées-mondes », 321-333.

12 Cette formule est empruntée à Martin Muller et Julie Grieshaber. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2024.2312660>

13 C'est précisément l'enjeu du projet « Prenons le contrôle du climat ! », porté par ICOM France. Démarré en 2024, il s'appuie sur le programme *Getting climate control under control* développé par Ki Culture visant à optimiser le contrôle du climat dans les musées afin de réduire l'empreinte carbone globale du secteur.

14 Bizot Group (2023), Green Protocol. Consulté le 16 septembre 2025. https://www.cimam.org/documents/238/Bizot_Green_Protocol_-_2023_refresh_-_Sept_2023.pdf

15 Collectifs « Régie et Transition », Référents Développement durable, projets de recherche-action menés par l'Augures Num responsable et L'Augures lab Scénographie (Ignifugation & alternatives, Droits d'auteurs et réemploi, Clausier environnemental, scénographie et marchés publics).

Rethinking professionalism in museum education: Findings from Latvia's first national survey

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A museum is always an interpretation of life – a selective, meaningful construction of reality that prompts the question: *who is telling the story?* The 2022 ICOM museum definition underscores professionalism and community participation as fundamental aspects of museum practice. Museums in Latvia are regarded as professional institutions. By law, state and municipal museums undergo a rigorous and recurrent accreditation process to “ensure the professionalism and quality of the museum’s core functions” (Ministry of Culture, 2010). Accreditation affirms institutional legitimacy and secures access to financial support.

In 2024, the first-ever representative survey on museum education in Latvia was conducted to address a longstanding gap in knowledge about museum education and educators, reaching 71% of accredited museum directors and museum educators in the country. As part of the broader research project, researchers sought to explore the question: *what education, knowledge and skills museum directors identify as important to the work of museum educators?*

Theoretical framework

The concept of professionalisation of museum work refers to the process through which an occupation acquires the status of a profession. Museum educators as one of “museum professions” with their “professional activity” fit into this framing – as defined by the ICOM Code of Ethics (ICOM, 2006, p. 41). Zeller (1984) observed decades ago that, although there was a growing body of literature on museum practices, very little had been published about the individuals who develop and implement these programmes. Despite the increased use of terms *profession* and *professional*, significant frustration within the field remains. Recent study on job titles found that many museum education professionals expressed a disconnect between their job title and their actual responsibilities (Ripley & Hurley, 2025).

The ongoing discussion around professionalism – which involves “placing oneself in the hands of qualified experts” and “requires practitioners to be worthy of that trust” (Evetts, 2014, p. 32) – raises questions about the knowledge and skills applied by museum educators in their practice, or the “distinct expertise and abilities acquired through extensive research, education, and training in a specific field of knowledge” (Khosrowjerdi et al., 2024, p. 8). Professions are typically understood as knowledge-based

service occupations that require tertiary education, vocational training, and practical experience (Evetts, 2014).

The increasing involvement of museums in formal education has also brought attention to what Trofanenko and Segall (2014, p. 2) call “the pedagogical ambiguity” – the blurred boundaries between museum education and formal schooling. This shift prompts critical pedagogical discussions that were once limited to formal education professionals. As Hansson and Öhman (2022, p. 472) argue, it has created a need for greater pedagogical reflection in museum education practice. This is supported by a recent publication that acknowledges a clear “pedagogical turn,” where visitor experience is seen as integral, alongside traditional object-focused scholarship (Ripley & Hurley, 2025, p. 4).

However, when the term professionalism was explicitly included in the official definition of a museum (ICOM, 2022), it also sparked debates. As noted by participants in the ICOM Define Consultation Report (2021), such a turn would be particularly hurtful in relation to community-led museums, where the term *professional* may pose bureaucratic barriers. But the challenge is wider than that, as many so-called traditional museums also rely – or over-rely – on volunteers within education departments (Kai-Kee, 2011). “Taken literally, it excludes all voluntary workers ... It would cut them off from most funding and public support” (ICOM, 2021, p. 53).

Referencing the previous work of Zeller, Kletchka (2021), instead of tertiary education-based professionalisation advises a more holistic approach, recognizing different cultural contexts of museums. Then what crucial knowledge, skills, and experiences are expected from museum educators? Tran and King (2007) identify three core knowledge domains for museum educators: pedagogical knowledge relating to teaching and learning in addition to collection related content knowledge, and specific to the museum contextual knowledge. The empirical study will interpret the Latvian case according to this more holistic approach.

Research methodology

The study was based on quantitative data analysis. Primary data were obtained through a survey conducted among representatives of accredited museums in Latvia. The survey method involved self-administered online questionnaires (SurveyMonkey platform). They were piloted with five museum representatives. The survey fieldwork took place from 9 May to 4 July 2024. A total of 167 museum directors were invited to participate, including 116 accredited museums and 51 structural units. In total, 116 representatives of accredited museums completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 71% of the total population. The achieved sample is considered representative and allows for data interpretation with a $\pm 5\%$ sampling error at a 95% confidence level. Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyse the data.

Results and discussion

In Latvia, museums undergo a rigorous and recurrent accreditation process to “ensure the professionalism and quality of the museum’s core functions” (Ministry of Culture, 2010). Notably, since 2020, there has been a cultural heritage master’s programme at the Latvian Academy of Culture, which includes courses on museum theory and museum education; however, specific higher education is not a prerequisite for hiring a museum educator. There are multiple local further education opportunities, provided both by higher education institutions – such as the 160-hour programmes “Fundamentals of Museum Work” and “Scientific Research Work and Museum Communication” – as well as local and international short-term professional development and experience exchange events.

Museum educators in Latvia are characterized by a wide diversity in age, years of experience in museums, and educational backgrounds. Notably, 61.5% of all museum educators are employed full-time. In 27% of museums, there is no single staff member whose primary or full-time responsibility is museum

education. Approximately half of all museum educators, or 52.2%, have higher education related to teaching. The most common job title among museum educators is *museum pedagogue* (42.7%), followed by *education programme curator/manager* (25.6%). The growing trend of referring to museum educators as curators could reflect an effort to elevate the significance of education within museums as “an attempt to rectify hierarchy, insisting on the centrality of education work to the intellectual leadership of the institution” (Ripley & Hurley, 2025, p. 5). In Latvia, job titles are shaped according to occupational classification codes, which are associated with differences in average salaries for public institutions. Museums in Latvia experience frequent staff changes, as 33.3% of employees have less than three years of experience. Eighty-eight percent of those working in museum education are women – a sharp gender imbalance that may be further explained by close to minimal wages.

When museum directors are asked about the understanding of museum education in Latvia, the most common associations were educational activities in the museum – 27.6%, educators conducting educational work – 10.3%, educational work with schoolchildren and children – 15.5%, interactive educational activities – 11.2%, a form of education for people of all ages – 7.8%, and *the Latvian School Bag* programme – 7.8%. Since the introduction of the nationwide, state-funded programme *Latvian School Bag* in 2018, which provides two cultural experiences for each student through a school year, it is no surprise that the focus of museum education has shifted towards school groups, thus shaping the general understanding of what museum education is.

Based on the survey data (Table 1) museum directors rate skills to conduct educational work with children (97.4%), youth (97.4%), and adults (93.1%) as important (4) or very important (5). In contrast, **pedagogical domain** (Tran & King, 2007) is generally perceived as less important to the job of a museum educator. Roughly half (51.7%) of museum directors rank any education in pedagogy as important or very important. Prior pedagogical experience is viewed as more valuable, with 68.1% of directors considering it important or very important.

Table 1: In your opinion, how important are the following skills/or experiences in performing museum education?

	Total	1 – Not at all important	2	3	4	5 – Very important	Hard to say
English language skills	116	1.7	8.6	37.1	24.1	21.6	6.9
Russian language skills	116	12.9	19.8	29.3	21.6	4.3	12.1
Teamwork/collaboration skills	116	0.0	0.0	4.3	17.2	76.7	1.7
Communication/interpersonal skills	116	0.0	0.0	0.9	5.2	91.4	2.6
Organisational/planning skills	116	0.0	0.0	2.6	22.4	73.3	1.7
Higher education in a relevant field	116	3.4	9.5	25.9	36.2	19.0	6.0
Pedagogical education	116	1.7	10.3	32.8	31.9	19.8	3.4
Experience in pedagogical work	116	0.9	6.0	21.6	37.9	30.2	3.4
Skills in using digital tools and social media	116	0.0	2.6	9.5	34.5	51.7	1.7
Experience in museum education	116	0.9	8.6	19.8	37.1	29.3	4.3
Skills working with children audience	116	0.0	0.0	0.9	11.2	86.2	1.7
Skills working with youth audience	116	0.0	0.0	0.9	11.2	86.2	1.7
Skills working with adult audience	116	0.0	0.9	3.4	23.3	69.8	2.6

Source: A survey conducted by authors among representatives of 116 accredited museums in Latvia, 2024.

The **content knowledge domain**, or museum educators’ expertise in the specific disciplines of their museums, enables them to highlight key features and salient histories, offer deeper insights, and respond flexibly to visitors’ interests and choices (Tran & King, 2007). However, according to Table 1, again roughly half (55.2%) of museum directors consider education in a field related to museum con-

tent important or very important for the job. Previous experience in museum education is seen as more valuable, with 66.4% considering it important or very important.

The third domain – **specific to museum contextual knowledge** – includes the physical context of the building and surrounding area, the community context at local, regional, national, or international levels, and temporality, such as the period and specifics of visits (Tran & King, 2007). In Latvia (Table 1), museum education is predominantly local and focused on Latvian speaking population, with English and Russian language skills considered important or very important by 45.7% and 25.9% of museum directors, respectively. The survey highlights ongoing digital transformation context, with 86.2% of museum directors viewing digital skills important and very important for the role. A previous study on museum education in Latvia's museums supports the data and provides an explanation, showing that the introduction of digital education activities and tools was the Top1 digital innovation implemented during the period of global COVID pandemic (Vikmane & Klāsons, 2023).

The survey results suggest an additional domain that appears most important to museum directors in Latvia – so-called “**soft skills**,” such as communication, collaboration, creativity, teamwork, motivation and effort among others (Jacobson-Lundeberg, 2016). This domain is often regarded as employability skills or “work readiness” (Al Asefer, 2021). In Latvia's museums, skills like teamwork and collaboration (94.0%), communication and interpersonal skills (96.6%), and planning and organizational skills (95.7%) are considered significantly more important or very important than tertiary education or prior experience in pedagogy or museum education, which are traditionally associated with the trusted expertise linked to professionalization of museum education.

Conclusion

The study raises further questions about professionalism due to a misalignment between existing frameworks and on-the-ground realities. In Latvia, the normative framework requires museum directors to ensure professionalism and quality of the core functions. However, the extreme emphasis on soft skills for museum educators, the absence of specific educational requirements as a prerequisite for hiring, and the extremely low salaries suggest the need for further discussion on whether the normative framework reflects and suits current realities. While museum educators are expected to demonstrate readiness to engage and educate diverse audiences, pedagogical and content-based knowledge – usually acquired through higher education, professional training, or prior experience – is seen as far less important for approximately half of museum directors. Instead, they strongly prioritize soft skills and digital competence, which, alongside expertise or so-called hard skills, form part of professional practice. High praise for soft skills may be typical in contexts where tertiary education or training is a precondition for employment, but are soft skills alone sufficient to define a professional museum educator or to perform museum education professionally? Or could there be another way – rectifying the hierarchies within the normative framework – that would allow Latvian museum educators to be viewed as passionate community members participating in museums for the public good, in line with the latest definition of museums, rather than having their professional backgrounds questioned.

Acknowledgements

The project ‘Striving Towards Participatory Engagement in Museums: Inquiry Into Museum Education Practice in Latvia (MEET)’ (No. lzp-2022/1-0379) is being implemented by the Latvian Academy of Culture and funded by the Latvian Council of Science.

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Migration museology: Museums as processes for integration

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This research explores migration museology, an emerging field investigating how individuals with migrant backgrounds utilise museums to find common ground, preserve cultural heritage, share personal stories and promote intercultural dialogue. Set within the Scottish context, the study aims to develop migrant museology based on migrants' perspectives, motivations and experiences, and how it will re-shape traditional museum practices to meet the needs of both current and future communities.

Several actions initiated by migrants demonstrate various non-Western approaches to preservation and interpretation, but a single regional museology cannot explain them; instead, they develop a new paradigm. This study posits that cultural integration acts as both a driver and an outcome of migration museology. The authors apply Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), interviewing eight participants to explore its multiple interpretations at the individual level. It also examines four case studies, summarising four modes of using museums for integration, and compares migration museology with traditional, new and Indigenous museologies to identify its philosophical and practical dimensions.

Methodology

This research combines case studies with IPA to bridge the philosophy and practice of migration museology at individual and societal levels.

It examines four Scottish cases that range from 2021 to 2025:

Scottish Crannog Centre (SCC): Migrants reinterpret human settlement narratives by contributing objects, poetry and stories, weaving their survival experiences into Scotland's Iron Age heritage. Since 2022, the annual Rise and Shine Festival has featured migrant and refugee artists sharing cultural practices, such as Eritrean coffee ceremonies and Ukrainian music. This transforms the SCC into a dynamic platform for integration.

Migrant Voice (MV) initiatives: Migrant Voice's cultural projects empower migrants to curate photographic displays and challenge stereotypes, such as the "Outside In" exhibition at Maryhill Burgh Hall and "Putting Ourselves in the Picture" at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

Museum of Things project: Initiated by the Maryhill Integration Network (MIN) in 2021 and later developed with The Hunterian in 2025, this project invites migrants to contribute everyday objects and artworks and co-create pieces for the Hunterian.

Museum of Ukrainian Craft and Culture Scotland (MUCCS): This digital-born museum bridges Scotland and Ukraine by crowdsourcing artefacts, oral histories and creative responses from the Ukrainian diaspora and their Scottish allies. Since launching in 2023, its flagship online exhibition

“The Weight We Carried” invites refugees, volunteers and heritage professionals to upload heirloom textiles, wartime diaries and newly written poems.

IPA is a qualitative method rooted in phenomenology and hermeneutics, focusing on how individuals interpret their lived experiences. It is particularly effective for exploring new phenomena through diverse perspectives, capturing migrants’ subjective experiences in museum practices. The study involved semi-structured interviews with eight participants, chosen for their various roles and contributions to migration museology, who all took part in the initiatives mentioned above.

Findings and discussion

Agency derived from migration

The eight participants have unique personalities and life experiences, yet they share a common thread: their migration journeys facilitate transformation, which becomes a source of agency. This enables them to reclaim narratives, challenge injustices and actively reshape their cultural identities. We can understand this transformation in three stages: (1) first museum encounter; (2) changes in social roles and cultural needs; and (3) (re)gaining agency.

For many migrants in the postcolonial era, initial museum encounters in their countries of origin occur within institutions influenced by traditional Western paradigms. The first experience can be positive or negative, depending on the individual’s context, but it highlights the power (or violence) of museums. These encounters often lead to deeper critiques later in life. Formosa described his first museum impression as “focused on preservation and national pride”. Endeavour likened museums to an “encyclopaedia, where you can see the knowledge learned from books come to life”. Daga expressed strong doubts about institutions that objectify human remains: “I see a human skull on display, which to me is an unburied body placed with other items in a space of objecthood.” His reflections highlight how museums perpetuate “brutal forms of structures” from colonisation, even in non-Western contexts like Eritrea, where Daga first visited museums.

The transformation emerges upon arrival in Scotland, where social roles and cultural needs evolve. Migration disrupts the familiar, forcing individuals to renegotiate their positions in society. Endeavour’s journey illustrates this shift in power dynamics: when a UK colleague asked her to tell LGBTQ+ stories from Chinese ceramic collections, she felt discomfort – not from the topic, but from the imposition of an external narrative onto her cultural lens and the tokenism of diversity. She mentioned the need to gain the power of interpretation: “I want to use the museum to tell the story I want to tell”.

Migrants are (re)gaining agency through museum practices that are self-driven. Daga’s experience demonstrates how migration facilitates reclamation. Daga’s facilitation of Eritrean coffee ceremonies at the Rise and Shine Festival exemplifies agency in ongoing action: “The coffee ceremony is like a travelling museum, a museum that’s always migrating ... and that’s always evolving with who is attending in that space”. This ritual creates a “holding space” where intercultural synergy and restorative knowledge emerge.

This agency, derived from migration, combines heightened awareness of epistemological injustices, a drive to preserve endangered heritage and efforts to construct resilient identities in diaspora.

Four modes of using museums for integration

Drawing from the four case studies and eight interviews, we develop a framework that views museums as dynamic processes for integration. This model features two axes: a vertical one contrasting “preservation” (maintaining tangible and intangible cultural heritage) with “creation” (generating new interpretations and creativity); and a horizontal one distinguishing the museum’s role as “media” (a platform for sharing information) from “method” (an active tool for participation, co-creation and transfor-

mation). Mapping these axes results in four distinct modes: (1) Contact Port; (2) Dialogue Waves; (3) Identity Anchor; and (4) Creative Beacon.

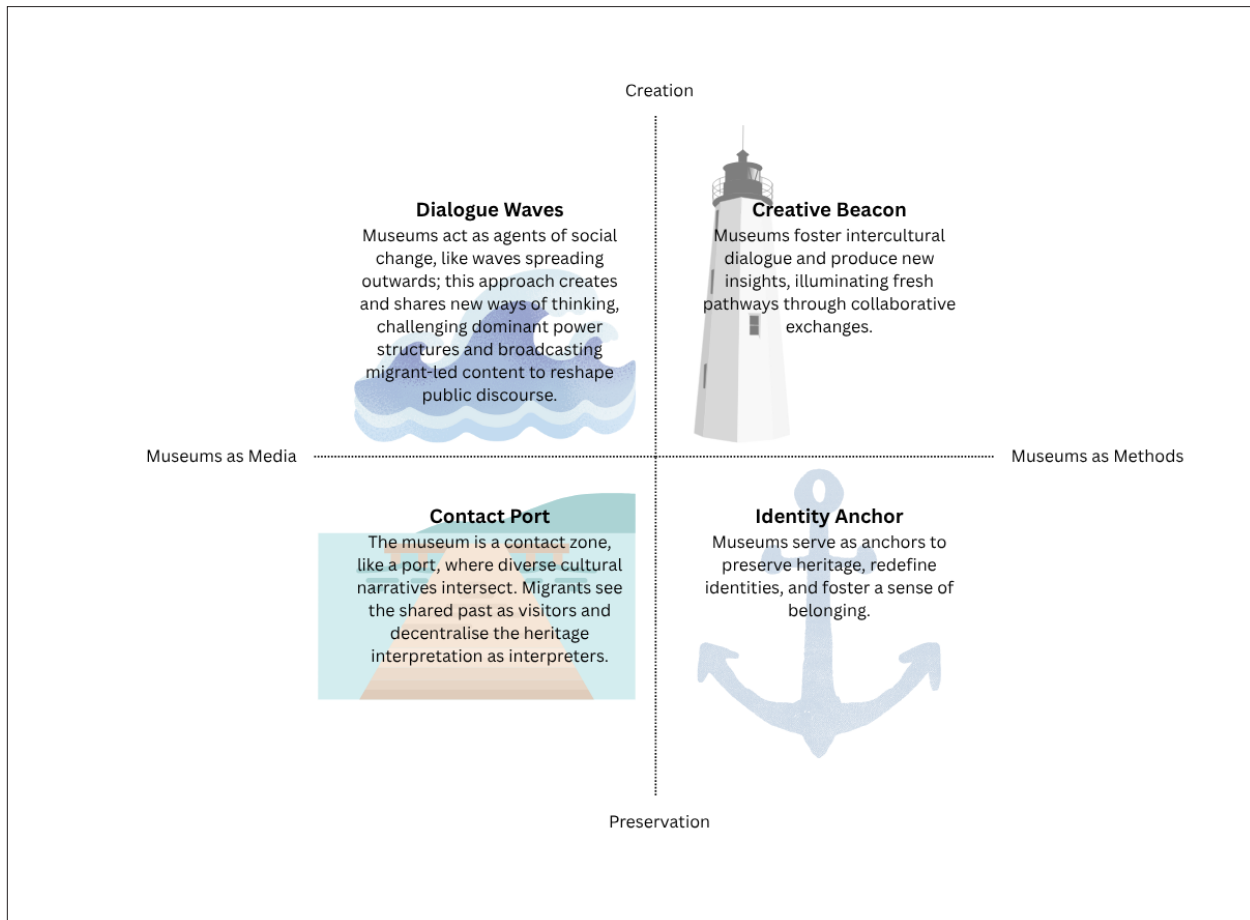


Figure 1: Four Modes of Using Museums for Integration. Source: Hsiao-Chiang Wang.

Contact Port

A “port” is where diverse cultural narratives intersect, emphasising shared pasts and allowing visitors to encounter different cultures and uncover common ground. Unlike the “World Culture” sections in traditional museums, which often impose Western-centric views, migration museology decentralises this by preserving and sharing “our” shared past. Migrants act as both source communities and interpreters, making meaning of the heritage.

Daga’s donation of quartz stones from an Eritrean massacre site exemplifies this, symbolising unity and resistance. As he reflects, these stones tell “a story of the suffering of that moment but also a symbol of unity among the people that were inseparable when it comes to life”. He donated them to the SCC, a museum rebuilt after fire destruction in 2021.

Dialogue Waves

Like waves rippling outwards, this mode generates and disseminates new ways of thinking, challenging dominant power structures and broadcasting migrant-led content to reshape public discourse.

In the MIN Museum of Things project, migrants contribute personal objects, create artworks and collaborate on reinterpretations. Exhibitions invite audiences to rethink refugees not as a “problem” or

passive recipients but as cultural sources and active co-creators. Like Sadaf, as a refugee artist, said, “I am glad now people know our voice, and know our views”.

Identity Anchor

Here, museums serve as transformative methods for preserving and reshaping identities, anchoring migrants in their cultural roots and fostering a sense of belonging. This mode focuses on participation.

The MUCCS uses digital crowdsourcing to anchor diaspora identities, allowing users to upload and reinterpret artefacts. At the SCC, Ukrainian migrants engage in traditional embroidery and music. Formosa and Endeavour share Taiwanese tea, introducing the tea ceremony and inviting other migrants and locals to contribute their traditions. Instead of one-way give or take, it is a meaningful exchange, (re)learning and identity building. Formosa described that when sharing tea, he “builds connection with other people and the sense of belonging here in Scotland”.

Creative Beacon

This mode facilitates intercultural dialogues and generates new insights, illuminating fresh paths.

In Migrant Voice’s “Ye Awright, Pal?” exhibition, vision groups co-create drawings that spark dialogues on themes like resilience and culture clashes, using the museum as a method for intercultural exchange.

In summary, these four modes provide a flexible toolkit for museums in integration efforts. They illustrate how museums can evolve beyond traditional roles, fostering genuine inclusion.

Migration museology

Migration museology is a crucial approach in the age of global mobility, using the museum not just as a place or channel but also as a concept and method to foster integration.

Ontology: Fluid realities

Migration museology views reality as fluid and hybrid, constructed through co-creation and connection, as in the SCC’s linkage of Iron Age and refugee narratives or the Museum of Things placing refugees’ artworks within museum collections.

This contrasts with traditional museology, which assumes a universal, objective (yet biased) and hierarchical reality, with artefacts as timeless truths (Bennett, 2013). It is not the same as Indigenous museology, which emphasises relational, land-based realities where objects are sacred and tied to ancestors (Wang, 2023). Migration museology shares relational elements with Indigenous approaches and inherits the multifunctionality of new museology (Vergo, 1997) but uniquely prioritises transnationality over rootedness.

Epistemology: Co-created knowledge

In migration museology, knowledge emerges from lived migrant experiences, critical evaluation of dominant narratives and co-creation, as exemplified by the discussion processes in Migrant Voice’s initiatives.

Unlike traditional museology’s empirical, top-down classification, it draws from Indigenous museology’s oral traditions and communal practices (Kreps, 2006), and new museology’s dialogic, interdisciplinary inquiry with visitor involvement (Vergo, 1997). Migration museology distinctively integrates transnational exchanges to validate diverse epistemologies.

Axiology: Value shared humanity

Migration museology is grounded in shared humanity and values restorative integration. While traditional axiology often misuses “preservation for all humanity” to prioritise “high culture” and national

identity, masking colonial ethics (Bennett, 2017), Indigenous museology emphasises sovereignty and repatriation for revitalisation (Wang, 2023). Migration museology does not seek repatriation but encourages donating and creating objects for museums, telling stories or reinterpreting collections as seen in “Putting Ourselves in the Picture”, SCC and “Museum of Things”. Through intercultural dialogue, it pursues mutual understanding, shared interpretive power and rebuilt identities.

In summary, built on migrants’ agency, migration museology demonstrates four traits: (1) a focus on fluid, transnational narratives that blend past and present experiences; (2) co-creation of knowledge system and ongoing intercultural dialogues; (3) ethical commitment to anti-racism and social cohesion; and (4) participatory methods and non-hierarchical relationships. It offers a forward-looking model for museums in the present and future.

Conclusion

This study identifies the agency of migration museology as a transformative force, rooted in migrants’ lived experiences and their capacity to reclaim narratives, contest injustices and reshape cultural identities. It challenges Western-centric paradigms and redefines museums as inclusive spaces for intercultural exchange.

It contracts four modes of museum practice and offers a practical framework for understanding museums as dynamic processes in integration. Contact Port facilitates encounters with shared pasts, decentralising narratives through migrant-led interpretations; Dialogue Waves disseminate innovative ideas to reshape public discourse; Identity Anchor provides methods for anchoring and transforming identities via participatory activities; and Creative Beacon illuminates new paths through co-creative dialogues.

Furthermore, it elaborates the migration museology paradigm as a transformative framework that reimagines museums as active processes for cultural integration and hybrid identity formation. Rooted in the lived experiences of migrants, this paradigm emphasises fluid, transnational narratives; co-creative practices that empower diverse voices; an ethical focus on anti-racism and belonging; and participatory methods that challenge hierarchical structures. Drawing from Scottish case studies and comparative analyses with traditional, new and Indigenous museology highlights museums’ role in fostering social cohesion amid global mobility, offering theoretical insights into decolonial knowledge production and practical tools for inclusive heritage practices in multicultural societies.

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Cultivating museum professionals: Rethinking talent development for the real world

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Contemporary museums demand diverse competencies including curatorial strategy, digital archiving, licensing, co-creation, and audience engagement rooted in equity. In Taiwan, around 38 university departments touch on these domains, yet no undergraduate program is dedicated solely to museum studies. Only three graduate institutes offer specialized degrees, with another three providing related tracks. Despite the diversity of learning pathways in Taiwan's museum studies education, the absence of focused professional training has created a noticeable learning-practice gap, often necessitating extensive readjustment once students enter the field.

Drawing on a decade of museum experience, especially in youth-focused, cross-sector collaborations and current teaching roles in museum practice and arts administration, the author identifies three critical gaps between education and practice: (1) the declining interest of younger audiences, increasingly driven by immediacy over depth; (2) the growing dominance of digital and virtual spaces in shaping youth perspectives; and (3) a generational break in professional cultivation, marked by organizational imbalance and practical-educational disconnect. These concerns prompt a central question: If museums are alternative learning spaces, can conventional education still meet their evolving needs?

Research methodology and teaching site observations

This study adopts action research, emphasizing the educator as practitioner who iteratively plans, acts, observes, and reflects to address real-world problems (Arnold & Norton, 2018). This approach supports the study's aim of bridging gaps between education and museum practice.

From March to June 2025, observations were conducted in a museum studies course involving students from freshman to senior year. The course focused on curatorship and revealed three key challenges:

1. **Surface-level understanding of curatorship:** Students often viewed curating as basic exhibition planning, lacking awareness of deeper interpretive and conceptual strategies behind professional practice.
2. **Fragmented curatorial logic:** Student proposals frequently lacked coherence in theme and structure, likely shaped by digital reading habits and limited critical training.
3. **Lack of cultural field awareness:** Few students understood museum systems, institutional roles, or career paths, making it difficult to link academic learning to real-world practice.

In response, a hybrid model was introduced, combining double-loop learning for reflective thinking and scaffolding learning to build skills through structured, applied tasks.

Rethinking educational practice in a transforming learning environment

Recent shifts in global education, particularly the rise of artificial intelligence, have prompted renewed emphasis on learner adaptability and value-based competencies. The OECD's "Future of Education and Skills 2030" project advocates for "transformative competencies" that go beyond skill acquisition to

include the capacity to navigate complexity, create new value, and act responsibly. This framework has been adopted in Taiwan's national curriculum reform, especially at the secondary level.

The OECD's Learning Compass outlines this vision through the guiding principles of creation, reconciliation, and responsibility, supported by a pedagogical model that encourages overlapping themes and conceptual depth (OECD, 2024). However, scholars Rappleye et al. (2024) have critiqued its limited cultural contextualization, noting its inadequacy for non-Western learning environments.

University students born after 2000, often referred to as the digital native generation, now comprise the majority of learners in higher education. In response, this study integrates generative AI as a scaffolding mechanism within course design, with the aim of fostering reciprocal and interactive learning. The tool's ability to offer personalized guidance supports students' iterative thinking and engagement. However, its educational use demands sustained critical reflection. Both instructors and students must remain aware of essential principles when working with AI, including the promotion of critical thinking, the cultivation of emotional resilience, and the ethical use of technology.

Pedagogical implementation design

This course adopted double-loop learning as its core framework, supported by scaffolding learning to construct a dynamic instructional model. Originally developed by Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön (Argyris, 1977) and later expanded by Peter M. Senge (1997), double loop learning emphasizes reflection on mental models and underlying assumptions to foster deeper innovation. While single-loop learning helps students acquire basic skills, double-loop learning prompts them to critically reframe prior knowledge and develop real-world adaptability in cultural contexts.

The course centered on a relatable curatorial topic "hometown food and cultural memory" to help students incorporate narrative strategies into cultural project design. The curriculum was structured into six stages across four weeks followed by two weeks of peer sharing (two hours per session).

Generative AI functioned as a scaffolding tool to help students enhance curatorial thinking and narrative development throughout:

1. **Grounding:** The instructor introduced core disciplinary concepts.
2. **Setup:** Each group created a shared AI project, inputting member backgrounds and assigning the AI as a "curatorial team partner."
3. **Inspiration:** Using teacher-provided prompts and templates, students engaged in idea development through AI-assisted dialogue.
4. **Collaboration:** Students gathered data from Taiwanese cultural databases, conducted textual analysis, and co-wrote exhibition texts with AI.
5. **Simulation:** Groups discussed instructor-generated real-world scenarios, such as audience reactions or potential crises with AI to practice adaptive strategies.
6. **Reflection:** Teams exchanged feedback and reassessed their plans based on cultural complexity and the feasibility of AI suggestions.

Each team presented their projects at the end of the course. Instructors reviewed AI transcripts and curatorial materials beforehand and led a reflective dialogue session to encourage students to think beyond task completion.

Conclusion and future directions

This study explores how intentional course design can bridge the gap between students' understanding of curatorial work and the realities of museum practice. Drawing on the framework of double-loop learning, the curriculum was structured to foster both practical competencies and critical self-reflection, addressing the disconnect between academic training and workplace expectations in museum

talent development. A key observation emerged through Taiwan's required end-of-term feedback mechanism: over half of the students reflected on "what curatorial competencies they acquired" and "how they developed deeper reflections on curatorial thinking." Beyond improving the feasibility of their proposals, many began to explore not only how to extract ideas from digital content but also how to uncover authentic, personal storylines that enhance curatorial resonance.

As part of the project-based unit, students were invited to critically assess the role of AI as a curatorial partner. Their reflections demonstrated discernment and awareness. Selected feedback includes:

"Through this collaboration with AI, we found that while it efficiently highlighted key points from our questions, its responses lacked contextual accuracy in news and historical facts. Human judgment is still necessary to verify and reflect on such content." — *Anonymous Student A*

"The AI could respond to our prompts, but it couldn't offer a concrete curatorial direction." — *Anonymous Student B*

"Its answers were often repetitive or overly broad, requiring group members to further curate and clarify the direction." — *Anonymous Student C*

"While the AI was not very practical for curatorial planning, its interactive questions at the end of our sessions helped prompt new thinking." — *Anonymous Student D*

These responses suggest that students had begun to develop foundational media literacy and critical thinking, recognizing AI's potential as a tool for support rather than authority. Within this course, AI functioned as an "invisible staircase," offering phase-based scaffolding through personalized dialogue and content generation. It supported students in constructing narrative structures while also serving as a reflective mechanism within the curatorial learning process in the end-part.

By integrating double-loop learning with digital scaffolding, the course equips students with adaptive strategies and contextual insight. In the future, the instructor plans to extend this approach through the creation of a "practice-based mentorship community," a professional network linking students with museum practitioners. A mentorship model will be introduced to foster interdisciplinary guidance with industry needs.

This study underscores competency, adaptability, and reflective learning as essential foundations for cultivating the next generation of museum professionals. Drawing on the author's dual perspective as a former museum practitioner and current educator, it acknowledges the limitations of traditional instruction in equipping students for the complexities of contemporary cultural work. By engaging in ongoing cycles of action research, this initiative seeks to continuously refine pedagogical strategies and ensure that museum education remains aligned with the dynamic demands of the professional field.

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More-than-taxidermy: Entangled relations in a veterinary museum

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In Thailand, curatorial practices in natural history museums tend to follow an anthropocentric approach, one that centres habitat group display, which emphasizes arranging animals in poses that reflect their natural behaviour and environments (Jongkol, 1989). This paper seeks to explore alternative curatorial practices that challenge the notion of a singular way of thinking. It begins by examining the relationships between humans and nonhuman entities within the museum context, employing anthropological tools to develop a deeper understanding of these dynamics.

The Veterinary Museum at Mahidol University displays taxidermy, animal skeletons, disease specimens and veterinary knowledge, aiming to promote understanding in the field of veterinary science (Mahidol University, 2018). The museum does not have a curator; instead, it is managed by staff from the Faculty of Veterinary Science, particularly those working at “The Monitoring and Surveillance Centre for Zoonotic Diseases in Wildlife and Exotic Animals”. The exhibition narratives aim to connect knowledge of zoonotic diseases with the everyday lives of humans. The displays focus primarily on small mammals such as rats, bats and squirrels.

This paper is based on fieldwork gathered through participant observation with staff from the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Mahidol University, with the aim of understanding human-taxidermy relations. I began by asking: how is the co-creation between curators and specimens enacted within the veterinary museum space? Particular attention was given to the process of acquiring specimens – an essential step in any museum that seeks to exhibit. This study revealed that curatorial work does not only occur within the physical boundaries of the museum; rather, it involves entangled relationships that unfold across multiple contexts.

I employed multispecies ethnography, an anthropological approach that shifts attention toward the study of nonhuman entities. Whereas traditional anthropology often regards nonhumans merely as components within human cultural systems, this approach seeks to engage more directly with animals, plants, fungi and atmosphere (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010).

I engaged with the practices of museum staff to gain deeper insight into these relations. This phenomenon, in turn, reflects how acts of enmeshment emerge within a museum, especially the veterinary museum that tells stories interwoven with both human and animal social worlds.

From curated space to wasteland

At 7:00 a.m., I arrived at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Mahidol University, as scheduled. Maew, a wildlife disease researcher and my key informant, handed me a scrub set replacing the clothes I had worn from home. At that moment, Aum, the veterinarian who would be accompanying us on the fieldwork, turned to me and said, “You already have a perfectly good life”. I did not quite understand what they meant at the time. How difficult could it be? We were just going to catch rats at a landfill site.

After changing into the scrubs, we departed for the “Nonthaburi Solid Waste Disposal Centre” in an official vehicle. Upon arrival, everyone began working immediately. I put on a pair of rubber boots to walk through the mud, caused by rainfall from the night before.

We walked windingly around the buildings and garbage mountains to check the traps that the staff had set the previous night. The parking area had dense grass nearly two meters tall and ivy vines climbing around the buildings. Only a small number of samples were found there, but the area with the most traps catching rats was around the factory building. I observed that this area had many rats because stray dogs were fed there, making it a place where rats might come to find food.

Maew explained that many people often think rats are dirty animals and disease carriers to humans. But the garbage piles contain only discarded human waste. Workers in this place often get infected from contact with this trash, therefore it is the veterinary staff’s responsibility to track disease traces in these dirty areas. These unseen garbage piles are places where the museum obtains specimens and they serve as sources attracting living beings – humans, animals, plants and pathogens. Through observation, I was reminded of Donna Haraway’s idea of “staying with the trouble”, a way of living with problems in a world already damaged. Haraway propose the concept of the Chthulucene, a world where the boundary between “nature” and “culture” no longer exists and humans are not placed above other beings. Haraway challenges the notion that scientific knowledge is the only valid form of understanding. One of her key ideas is the notion of “SF”, a term that she deliberately leaves open-ended. It can stand for scientific fact, science fiction or speculative fiction – a genre that imagines how humanity might respond if something unexpected or extraordinary were to happen in our world, often involving science and technology (Haraway, 2016).

This research seeks to apply the concept of “SF” to analyze representation in the Veterinary Museum at Mahidol University. For those who have visited a museum that features taxidermy, it may be familiar to notice how exhibitions often attempt to link their narratives to environmental issues, pointing to the negative consequences of human actions on our planet. I consider the power of science museums in their capacity to speculate, forecast or imagine futures yet to come – futures that are often received by audiences with a sense of credibility and trust. This is particularly evident in university museums, where scientific authority is deeply embedded in the institution’s identity (Cameron, 2005).

Haraway emphasizes that “SF” is about storytelling. This idea has been widely adopted across the social sciences, particularly in literature, due to its versatility in textual analysis. I contend that visiting a museum is not different from reading a book – it can be analyzed through the lens of “SF”. This study prompts us to reflect on how curators might convey narratives in museums that are not beautiful or uplifting but instead shaped by human-caused destruction. As outlined above, the key to this paper is to explore the potential of applying the perspective of the Chthulucene within the Thai context.

Specifically, I ask: how might museum professionals tell different stories about taxidermy? Through fieldwork with staff at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, I observed the possibility of translating the often-unpleasant realities of specimen collection into narrative form within the museum. This idea will be further explored in the following sections.

Among the living creatures inhabiting this mountain of waste, I also encountered the dead. On the first day, one of the traps was found submerged in water. Normally, the area surrounding the wastewater treatment building is lined with drainage channels, each covered with grates. However, there was one spot where the grate had been lifted and placed loosely on top, allowing the rat trap to fall through. The veterinarian speculated that one of the stray dogs in the area may have noticed the trapped rat and tried to play with it, inadvertently causing the trap to roll into the water. By the time we arrived, the rat had drowned, its body already stiff. In this case, the deceased specimens were taken back to the museum by

the veterinary staff for dissection and eventual taxidermy. Maew explained that “Once they’ve died, we must make the most use of their bodies”.

In other words, the veterinary staff are fully aware of the agency they hold and strive not to abuse the lives in their care. And when accidents or missteps occur, they do their utmost not to discard or waste those animals. These moments can be part of a museum exhibition. The death of a living being encountered during fieldwork becomes a museum object. In accordance with their ethical framework, the staff hold firmly to the principle that they will not kill animals for display; only those that have died naturally or unintentionally will be taken for exhibition purposes.

Reframing curatorial practice beyond species boundaries

My experience within the ecosystem of the mountain of garbage reveals that curatorial practice in a veterinary museum extends beyond the mere display of objects for the communication of veterinary knowledge. It also exposes the complex dimensions of human-animal relationships within the Chthulucene that may influence how meaning is produced within the museum. The preserved bodies of these animals, having undergone the process of skin preparation, should not be regarded as inert display objects devoid of sensation. Rather, they exist within a web of power relations, emotional complexity and ethical entanglements involving the veterinarians themselves.

In conclusion, I argue that curatorial work extends beyond the traditional roles of museum professionals or the mere management of display objects. The work of veterinarians with specimens – often involving creatures that are far from conventionally beautiful – should be reconsidered through the lens of more-than-human curatorial practice, which emphasizes interspecies relationships and the enmeshment between humans and more-than-human (Cameron, 2024).

As demonstrated throughout this paper, within the Veterinary Museum at Mahidol University – where knowledge of zoonotic diseases is shared in relation to both human and animal communities – I observe the presence of the Chthulucene that transcends anthropocentric narratives. These animals can be understood not merely as passive subjects but as part of a network that brings stories to humans. I hope that the practices involved in taxidermy – rich with adaptation, sensation, and emotional resonance – can meaningfully contribute to how representation and meaning are shaped within the museum.

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Writing for dialogue: Building a global conversation in museology

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How do we decolonize knowledge production in museology so that ideas and innovations move freely between Global South and North, periphery and center, practitioners and academics? As the field evolves, its progress depends upon sustained communication. ICOFOM provides infrastructure for knowledge-sharing – through symposia, conferences, journals, and monographs – yet many who try to engage with this system still find their insights isolated rather than integrated into global discourse. Why? Both systemic and individual barriers prevent us from building on each other's work and recognizing our contributions as part of a larger conversation. I will discuss ways to overcome those barriers.

As a rhetorician, my field is communication, and thus I begin with the idea that effective communication is a three-stage process. First, effective professional communication across the ICOFOM network requires producing presentations and publications on the international stage. As editor-in-chief of the *ICOFOM Study Series*, I have specific thoughts at the end on how you, the potential author, might best present your work. Second, though, communication requires listening – whether in person at a conference or through reading, and I'll share ideas about how we might improve our listening habits. Truly effective communication, though, also requires a third step: translating what we have heard or read into action, using what we learn from others in our network to expand our own next steps. We may wish to decolonize museology, but we aren't fully using the tools or shifting the habits that would help us do so.

The problem is not simply that we aren't sharing ideas, it's that we aren't sharing them with each other. Too often, our communication goal is to showcase our own work rather than build knowledge across the globe. We've all experienced those frustrating conversations where people talk past one another, each focused inward. As a network, ICOFOM – and global museology more broadly – misses opportunities to connect ideas to broader debates and so persuade others that local experiences matter globally and drive intellectual innovation. Let me explore two sets of barriers to the global conversation.

Systemic barriers

There are long-standing restrictions on who gets to speak and what counts as knowledge. In 2018, Bruno Brulon Soares and Anna Leshchenko published in our journal a study concluding that museology has been shaped by “colonial structures of power” (p. 66). They note that European theorists (and I would add North American theorists) found it hard to imagine the Global South as capable of producing knowledge and critical theory, and they cite multiple instances of widely circulated publications from the francophone *museologie* or the anglophone *museum studies* centers of power, which almost exclusively cite other centers-of-power publications as their only sources. Further, this is not only a problem of the North: Southern academics also often rely on canonical Northern theorists like Foucault, Bourdieu, or Habermas to understand their own social realities, they found.

Dissemination of theories from Global South museologists is also limited. For instance, last year, Anna-Lou Galassini et al. published in our journal a study tracking references to the 1972 Round Table of Santiago in published articles from *Museum International* (MI), the journal of ICOM, and our own

Study Series (ISS). There were an increasing number of references, particularly approaching the 50th anniversary of the Round Table. In both journals, references by scholars from the Global South outnumbered those from the Global North by nearly two to one. Further, there were actually very few articles for the first 40 years after the Declaration (average per decade: 2.75 in *MI*, 7.33 in *ISS*). These only grew in the decade 2010-19 (23 for *MI*, 19 for *ISS*), and they have since returned to a trickle in *MI*, though references in the *ISS* remain robust. References, of course, are not the same as critical engagement with the ideas or with incorporation of those ideas into one's own expanded theorizing. There are undoubtedly some articles that do that and others that do not, but the fact that there was such a spike in *MI* references and then a precipitous falling off suggests more commemoration than ongoing engagement.

Of course, ICOFOM has worked harder than much of the museological field to bring more global perspectives into our conversations. The shifting locations for our annual symposia; the series of monographs on decolonization; active regional groups like ICOFOM LAC and ASPAC; and cross-national partnerships for other conferences, for workshops, and for research projects – all these show our efforts to diversify our knowledge base. So what barriers remain?

Reflecting on the above studies and my own experience as the *Study Series* editor, I do see a healthy diversity of voices, and I see less of the overreliance on Northern theorists than when Ana and Bruno did their study. Authors often cite scholars from their own language group, which is a way of diversifying across the issues. I do see that some names come up much more frequently than others. Everyone seems to want to cite Bruno Brulon – in my three years at the *ISS* he was referenced more than twice as often as Conal McCarthy (the next-most cited scholar), and four times more than the dominant-scholar group of Mairesse, Bennett, Sandell, Bergeron, or Falk and Dierking. In short, while we do tend to cite a few common texts (which, except for Bruno's, come from the Global North), there is diversity beyond those names.

However, what we do not do is cite each other. Across all *ISS* articles, we average just four references per year to other *ISS* articles. Four. And some number of those four are citing Bruno. That's out of over 200 total citations. Only the Recife symposium issue fared better (11 references). If we want our work in ICOFOM to be read and respected, we must model that behavior ourselves to the world: we must cite *and engage with* the ideas of other members of ICOFOM. It should become somewhat easier to find each other, as I am pleased to report that, after several years of effort, we are now indexed in Scopus. But even there, Scopus told us that our weakest trait was limited citation of our articles. We need to engage with our colleagues – across regions and across languages – in our own scholarship and also in the materials we provide to our graduate students if we are to truly grow as a network of scholars engaged in conversation with each other. When I did a quick survey of *MI* last year, I found over 200 references to the graduate school at the University of Leicester, and 13 to that at UNIRIO. Richard Sandell alone was referenced 157 times. Sandell is great – but these disparities reinforce the dominance of Global North research. The same disparity holds true for the cluster of Global North museums discussed: some, like the quai Branly, are cited so frequently they become shorthand for universality. When the world lacks that same level of familiarity with museums or schools of the Global South, any discourse has to work harder to be recognized as a valid case study of *global* relevance.

Though *ISS* has a more diverse authorship than journals like *MI* or *Curator*, we must amplify the contributions of those authors by engaging their scholarship in our own. Otherwise, we perpetuate the field's focus on the research interests and publications of the North even as our own subject may be more expansive.

Obviously, language is also a systemic barrier. ICOFOM is alone in publishing in all ICOM official languages, yet that leaves much inaccessible – and of course those ICOM languages are colonial legacies. To my personal chagrin, partner restrictions and copyright concerns keep us from using more instantaneous translation. As individual readers, though we can commit to translating on our own the articles

in less familiar languages, keeping in mind that the discussion of that unfamiliar museum in Colombia may have as much to offer to universal museology as the quai Branly or the Tate and may well spur our knowledge and introduce new scholars outside our own grouping of the “usual suspects.”

Individual writing barriers

I’ve addressed systemic issues; let us return to individual ones in the production of the conversation, again based on my now three years as editor of our *Study Series* and my 30 years teaching writing. Because it is one thing to say, “engage with our authors” and another for those authors to give us a clear reason to do so.

So first, let me tell you the two questions I ask at least 50% of our potential authors about their article drafts: *What is your thesis? And why does this matter to global museology?* These two things – a thesis at the opening that provides the overarching reason *why* we should read the article and a reflection at the end that explains why the article *matters* – are essentially asking for the same thing: How is your local study a contribution to the global conversation? Too many articles boil down to what I call “Look at us!” This desire to just present the local museum accomplishment or study result is important: again, it is not just the quai Branly that can be a universal example. But articles need to *demonstrate* the reasons for that universal significance of the unique example. So consider how your article advances the conversation: How does it expand upon that museum initiative in Paraguay, contradict that teacher training idea from Latvia, or support that new insight from Tahiti that someone else wrote about in a journal like ours? (Or, in fact, in ours!) In other words, articles can be grounded in the local or in the results of a particular research project without being myopic. Articles that state in their opening why the subject of the article matters, that place this new research within the ongoing conversation (among scholars beyond the usual suspects), and that end with a reflection on how this article contributes to that larger conversation – these are the articles demanding to be engaged with globally.

Second, here is a scandalous suggestion: use AI. Not to write, but to translate. Legally, the *ISS* cannot translate you, but you can translate yourself. If English/Spanish/French is not your first language, draft in whatever language allows your thoughts to flow most freely, then use AI to translate to the ICOFOM language of your choice. You can refine those results to give it your voice and better align with your original. When we receive your article, our human proofreaders will then make further suggestions. The idea I want to emphasize here is that *writing* and *editing* are two different stages of production. The *writing* process should do everything possible to allow your thoughts to flow onto the page as effortlessly as possible. I tell my students “write bad sentences!” The *editing* process comes after the first draft, not during it.

Finally, do not let self-doubt stop you. Each year after a symposium it saddens me to see how many of the people we approach to expand their presentation into an article say no. Scholarly writing is a systemic barrier, yes, but it is also an internal hurdle. I am convinced that part of that self-doubt comes from feeling uncertain about the mechanics of the format. For help and encouragement, I point you toward the ICOFOM writing tip sheet at <https://drive.google.com/tips-for-writing>.

Conclusion

To conclude, contributing to a more effective global dialogue means *producing* text (in person or publication) that asserts its place in the conversation, *listening* to the texts of others (in person or by reading), including those others in our own journal and from unexpected sources, and *engaging* with those texts as we expand our own innovative thoughts and share them with the world. It is a recursive process, just like any effective conversation. The end goal is clear: to create a dynamic, reciprocal exchange of ideas that amplifies our collective impact and ensures that all voices are heard, engaged with, and built upon.

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Precarious labour, diversity and (in)equality in the Swedish museum sector

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The working conditions, well-being of the employees and the factors contributing to a sustainable, inclusive working life in the cultural sector have not become the focus of interest for scholars until recently (Murawski, 2021; Raicovich, 2021; Salerno et al., 2019). The emphasis is usually placed on *who* is being represented and *how* and who has access to the displayed heritage, whereas the question of who represents and in what conditions the heritage that is being produced and interpreted often remains unaddressed. Even recently published volumes on museum ethics, equity, and social relevance (Chynoweth et al., 2020; Eid & Forstrom, 2021) mostly address interactions with visitors and collections rather than hierarchies and working environments within institutions. Meanwhile, these issues are of particular relevance precisely because museums have a societal task of producing (diverse, inclusive, and accessible) cultural heritage. Hence the working conditions of those who are involved in this specific knowledge production should necessarily correspond to the values of equity, inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility promoted by the museums and societies at large; values outlined in ICOM's museum definition (2022).

Diversity, inclusivity, sustainability, and participation of communities are currently included not only at the level of museum practice but also in the international definition of how museums should operate. However, although museums all over the world are slowly working against their institutional origins and towards becoming open and inclusive arenas for public dialogue, the “backstage” of the everyday operations of these institutions often remains unchallenged. Some of the recent examples of how museums try to tackle this issue on a global scale are the fight for anti-racism and for BIPOC employees' rights in Canadian museums (Pauls, 2020) and the community practice of openly discussing wages and precarious jobs in museum institutions (Small, 2019). This brings forward the question of how it is possible to operate and communicate ethically and professionally in the conditions of understaffed, underfinanced, and precarious institutions which are supposed to serve the society.

The Swedish trade union for culture, communication, and creative industries (DIK) report “How does museum sector feel?” (Alm Dahlin, 2021), based on a questionnaire that addressed the working environment in Swedish museum institutions, is another key source for understanding the situation on the ground. The report indicated several negative developments in the sector that had started before, and were subsequently exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic. It also highlighted one of the main issues shared by most cultural industries today: as far as it refers to accessibility, safety, and creating sustainable institutions, museums focus first on the visitors and secondly on collections, often disregarding the staff's needs and well-being. For instance, according to the report most of the museum workers think that the pandemic restrictions were sufficient but came too late and were, in the first place, aimed at sustaining the visitors' safety, and not the employees' (Alm Dahlin, 2021). A similar picture can be observed in the spheres of diversity and working environment. The trade union's report indicates that the Swedish museum profession is female-dominated and homogenous: 70% of answers in the questionnaire came from women, and 12% of respondents had a non-Swedish background (p. 10).

These findings have a long history of being debated in the Swedish cultural sector. In 2011, a qualitative analysis of diversity in the Swedish public cultural sector was conducted by the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka (Edström & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2011) commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Culture. It also highlighted several issues, such as the fact that institutions “cannot give an example of how they are working with ethnic and cultural diversity” or “have problems with reaching out to individuals or organizations they would like to collaborate with” (Alm Dahlin, 2021, p. 16). In the study report, the authors’ recommendation was to focus on “anti-discrimination work” instead of “promoting diversity” (p. 43). They have also emphasized the tension between cultural policies and cultural practices (p. 6). More than 10 years after the report was published, what has changed in the area of diversity and anti-discrimination in the Swedish cultural institutions? This is one of the central questions that has prompted this paper.

To frame those questions, it is important to consider the previous research in the field both globally and in Sweden. There is a growing body of literature on museum activism and the social relevance of cultural institutions (Chynoweth et al., 2020; Janes & Sandell, 2019; Simon, 2016), which, in turn, is based on the earlier (e.g. Sandell, 1998, 2002) and more recent (Fleming, 2015; Guffey, 2023) research on inclusion and (in)equality in the museum world. However, as already pointed out, there’s usually a focus on how museums can include visitors, communities and stakeholders in their work, and little about the institutional structures and working environment of museum employees, which makes this line of research a valuable contribution to the museological field of studies.

I suggest bringing into the discussion decolonial phenomenologies and respective institutional critiques, including Lewis Gordon’s (2006, 2020) analysis of the mechanisms of institutional and discursive racism, Rauna Kuokkanen’s (2008) critique of the current paradigm of inclusivity and the ways to indigenize knowledge production institutions, and especially Sara Ahmed’s (2012) work on institutional racism, where she poses the questions of belonging or not belonging to institutional spaces that assume certain bodies as normative. As decolonial researchers (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012) point out, museums, just like universities, are the key modern institutions for knowledge production and distribution that are equally marked by coloniality and follow similar logics of sameness and otherness, belonging and non-belonging. The affective and corporeal aspects of diversity and inclusivity central for these theoretical approaches bring forward the issues of norms, abled and disabled bodies, and biopolitics in general. It also asks for the intersectional dynamic approach that would allow addressing the complexity of differences and discriminations (race, age, class, gender, education, disability, language, etc.).

The body of academic literature on Swedish cultural institutions is rather well developed: it takes on the issues of cultural diversity (Goodnow & Akman, 2008), migration (Johansson & Bevelander, 2017; Thor Tureby & Johansson, 2020), inclusion of underrepresented voices, such as LGBTQI+ communities (Axelsson & Åkerö, 2016) and national minorities (Hyltén-Cavallius & Fernstål, 2020; Westergren & Silvé, 2008). The main discourse, however, follows the same pattern and is focused on *who* is getting represented and *how* representation is being framed, with little to no attention on the working force that *performs* these representations (Ardalan, 2015).

Since the 1990s, the Swedish State has used cultural policies and museums to combat xenophobia and racism. In 1987 a Multicultural Centre (*Mångkulturellt centrum*) was opened in Botkyrka municipality near Stockholm, “the immigrant neighborhood,” which has a mission to “promote a society where diversity is reflected in the national self-image and where migration-related phenomena are a natural part of the Swedish cultural heritage” (Levitt, 2015, p. 42). Yet Levitt underlines an implicit institutional division of labour – the establishment of the Multicultural Center allowed for “outsourcing” all the diversity and immigration issues to this special institution, whereas the major Swedish museums continued staging “nation and world on display”. As I argue elsewhere (Zabalueva, 2023), this framework

allows for creating an institutional “mandate” to check the “diversity” box and, in the case of the museum project in Sweden in 2016-2020, which was supposed to address the issues of migration, gives the decision-makers an excuse to defund such projects because it “overlaps with the functions of existing institutions” (p. 61).

It is necessary to mention the recent history of the Swedish museum strategies and initiatives that attempted to address the issues of diversity, inclusion and equality. This refers to the initiatives of the 1990–2000s, including “Diversity mandate for cultural institutions” (1995), the “Multicultural Year” (2006) and “Intercultural initiative” (a programme to promote ethnic and cultural diversity, 2008–2010).

However, the *diversity of the museum workforce* is never articulated in initiative proposals or cultural policy documents, belonging rather to the sphere of labour rights and anti-discrimination policies. By introducing these issues to the field, this paper aims to breach this gap and include the discussion of labour rights, diversity, and anti-discrimination in the museological debates. This is especially timely as the cultural institutions in Sweden are having a hard time adapting to neoliberal policies, dealing with new labour regulations that engender more precarity on the labour market and still overcoming the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, as the 2021 report states, the “museum sector does not feel good” (Alm Dahlin, 2021) in Sweden today, and more measures are needed to improve the situation and reduce the negative developments.

This paper in many senses drafts the direction for the future research, which proposes to challenge the established limiting academic approaches that either study cultural institutions from exclusively humanities perspective or approach the working conditions from the social scientific viewpoint. I argue that it is necessary to combine the recent research on heritage (re)production, communication, and decolonisation with the situation on the ground, in the actual museum practice.

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Bridging expertise, building futures: France Muséums' scalable approach to strengthening museum sector capacity

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A museum is not only composed of collections, historical sites, or visitors; it is fundamentally shaped by the people who bring it to life: museum professionals. Their training, the way expertise is shared, and how knowledge is cultivated across regions are all critical in our evolving and intertwined ecosystem.

Since its inception, the 2007 intergovernmental agreement between France and the United Arab Emirates has placed capacity building at the heart of this collaboration. Established to support the creation of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which is considered as the first universal museum of the 21st century and the first of its kind in the Arab world, France Muséums (FM)¹ primary goal was not simply to transfer expertise, but to support Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT)² expanding the museum local ownership and to embed long-term professional development.

From the beginning, France Muséums has actively contributed to shaping the future workforce of the UAE's cultural sector: participating in recruitment processes, designing organizational frameworks, and implementing museum work patterns that, initially experimental, are now considered exemplary. The agency has also delivered targeted training programs focused on universal art history and core museum content (museumography, research, collection management, audience development and interpretation, digital humanities).

In the meantime, DCT has grown steadily, developing a broad and comprehensive range of policies beyond museums, increasing the need for highly qualified professionals able to deliver, and expanding both the size of the teams and their potential across a diversified number of cultural fields.

Fifteen years on, this experience has culminated in the development of scalable training initiatives, which were designed to merge strategic needs with local aspirations, and to anticipate future challenges within a fast-growing and complex cultural landscape. This paper explores how training is not a neutral activity but a strategic and transformative force, one that actively shapes institutional cultures, strengthens professional ecosystems, and redefines the role of museums as learning organizations.

1 Formerly "Agence France Muséums."

2 Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority and the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage merged into one entity in 2017.

Training as a museum core activity

Training and capacity building shall be regarded as structuring activities within the museum ecosystem rather than as peripheral or administrative functions. The definitions of museums adopted by ICOM in 1946 or refined onward by ICOFOM continuously underscored the pedagogic expectations one has of museums. In the latest version, the consultation extended it to a place “offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing”. Therefore, it must highlight the ongoing reality of the professionals, who won’t exclusively deliver this service to visitors but inherently keep it alive and benefit from it. As part of the social sciences sector, the work can’t be professionally performed in avoidance of the latest updates or sharing the newest best practices. To that extent, provoking professional meetings – would it be conferences, symposiums, joint projects or training sessions – are integral to museums, enabling experimentation and continuous reshaping of the individuals who take part in those living organisms.

Over the past years, DCT has actively equipped its museums with research funds and centres, enabling its cultural institutions to remain agile and responsive to the sector’s evolution and societal changes. Saadiyat Cultural District serves as an incubator for new practices and emerges organically through the professional development process. When aligned with institutional vision, training contributes to a coherent and motivating professional landscape. It fosters leadership, career development, and a common understanding of the museum’s goals, leading to cross-functional dynamics. France Muséums’ approach has consistently been systemic and participatory: from the diagnosis of needs to the co-construction of learning paths and the design of custom-made formats that evolve alongside professional roles.

Abu Dhabi’s narrative is to be a crossroad, and it shows in its very organic and eclectic pool of professionals coming from various backgrounds and put together into action by DCT’s vision. The creation of a career path framework – such as Masari – allowed for different levels of responsibility and skills development to be formalized. It supports institutional coherence in implementing strategies adapted to specific audiences, from new recruits to established experts, each with targeted goals. The Museum Shared Services (MSS) of DCT³ and the Capacity Building team of France Muséums developed over time the Training Need Analysis (TNA), aiming to provide the museums with a yearly platform to raise training requests, which are completed by individuals’ assessment, and to match the personal development suggested in the said career path and with the relevant instructor.

DCT talent development strategy associates various providers, international or local, such as the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy – a reference shaping the next generation of leaders from the UAE. For the heritage and museum core contents, ICCROM, Smithsonian Museum or Getty Conservation Institute delivered recurring programs such as one started in 2017 on earthen architecture preservation in Al Ain. Since the ignition of the bilateral agreement, France Muséums has played a catalytic role in connecting expert communities to Abu Dhabi, initially from France, but increasingly from other parts of the world (Lebanon, USA, Senegal, Armenia, etc.),⁴ to local professionals in Abu Dhabi.

This cross-functional approach of ideas and practices is one of the strengths of DCT and France Muséums’ model. It contributes to the creation of shared vocabularies, long-term partnerships, and portable modules that can be adapted and exported to other regions.

Recognized expertise, recontextualized

France Muséums’ proposition does not lie in exporting fixed models or prescriptive “best practices”

3 MSS has merged all museums business support departments (HR, Finance, General services, procurement). In the HR Department, the Talent Development unit is in charge of the training strategy and its implementation.

4 Figures are being consolidated for the General conference.

from France. Rather, it offers a palette of methodologies and expertise that can be adapted, recontextualized, and discussed. This emphasis on situated knowledge is what makes training a form of applied museology, constantly tested and enriched.

The agency brings together a vast array of competencies: museography, conservation, registrar, interpretation, digital strategy, sustainable development, communications, publishing, and more. Beyond the core museum functions, France Muséums has included new areas such as crisis management, illicit trafficking, accessibility, or ethical and creative new perspectives of AI, reflecting the changing responsibilities of museums in the 21st century. Most of these competencies apply to the heritage and museum field, yet are expandable to the cultural sector at large, with variations, such as creative industries (fashion, performing arts, architecture, design) or could benefit different audiences: students, professionals, general audience.

The evolving needs of DCT and its sub-entities have often motivated the broadening of the scope of its service providers, such as France Muséums. The museum expertise previously carried out mostly by Western fine art institutions has been recently expanded to ensure pluralism in the approach and accuracy of specific techniques. Lately, the accelerating strategy of Abu Dhabi's cultural scene based the DCT request for an extended panorama of training topics: to library and book professionals from the public library and the Arabic language centre, or to bio-scientific collections dedicated to the prefigurative teams of the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi.

Over time, the pedagogical posture of France Muséums has shifted. Early phases relied on expert-led sessions, structured around an asymmetrical knowledge dynamic. However, a shift toward co-construction and horizontal exchange of skills occurred. DCT employees are now beyond the need for raising awareness, but request to discuss and challenge their achievements; this forces training providers to comply with a contextual approach through peer-to-peer sourcing and prioritizing hands-on sessions engaging visiting experts with the local scene and assets. Trainers are no longer “instructors” but “facilitators”, according to bell hooks, working alongside local teams to solve problems, rethink models, and contextualize decision-making processes. The training practice is a mutual benefit: visiting professionals are exposed to new challenges and perspectives, deepening their understanding of museology in the Middle Eastern context, empowering local professionals, who are as active in building new ways in museology.

This evolution was greatly enabled by the foundational partnership established between France and the UAE. The project's experimental nature made it possible to test new models of knowledge transfer and governance. As other institutions emerged within the growing Abu Dhabi's museum ecosystem, these models were replicated, adapted, or challenged, resulting in more plural and resilient approaches to professional development.

The first cultural institutions served as a laboratory for early training experiments. Two complementary formats quickly emerged:

- Comprehensive program: longer-term, foundational programs targeting new joiners and emerging professionals from all functions.
- Bespoke training program: short, focused sessions dedicated to specific operational needs, exclusive to museum core functions.

MuseoPro, developed in partnership with the Institut national du patrimoine (INP), functions as a school-like structure that combines academics with field-based learning on a credit-based certification. Its inclusive model allows professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds – from marketing units to curatorial or operations to acquisitions units – to engage in peer learning, debates, and hands-on projects. Sessions are led by international experts and rooted in local challenges.

Bespoke programs, developed in parallel and exclusive to Louvre Abu Dhabi and Zayed National Museum, allow for more targeted interventions, tailored to specific departments. They are strict responses to the TNA, followed by pedagogical design, practical implementation, and post-training assessment.

This dual strategy, a comprehensive program like MuseoPro and agile, made-to-measure modules as Bespoke, responds to the complex reality of the cultural field in Abu Dhabi.

Capacity building as a transformative process

The impact of training goes far beyond skill acquisition. Traditional metrics (attendance, satisfaction surveys, grades) are insufficient to assess the depth of training impact. France Muséums has progressively adopted more complex tools: management meetings to assess institutional change, multi-stakeholder feedback, and ongoing tracking of how training outcomes translate into new processes, behaviours, or decisions.

Artistic networks can function as alternative forms of organization that generate both autonomy and solidarity. They operate beyond the constraints of bureaucratic institutions and market logic, enabling cultural actors to cooperate, share knowledge, and experiment collectively. (Gielen, 2009, p. 22)

The approach of Gielen is particularly relevant here. It captures the intangible yet powerful platform of capacity building: trust, shared language, professional networks, informal mentoring, and even creative collaborations. These outcomes may not be visible immediately, but they are crucial for long-term sector development. Thinking forward, France Muséums ensures the circulation of knowledge beyond the training moment, through an e-learning platform with compiled presentations, case studies, video recordings of the sessions, and reading lists to offer autonomous continuing capacity building. The team remains reachable to follow up and reactivate relevant connections with the facilitators.

Training also acts as a critical lens through which museum practices can be rethought. Who teaches whom? from which position? using what references? These questions invite a rebalancing of knowledge dynamics, moving beyond unique paradigms, to embrace a plurality of voices, approaches.

In some contexts, the trainer becomes a complice rather than a normative authority. This is particularly evident in consultancy-style interventions, such as those undertaken by France Muséums in the UAE, in Bolivia, or in Indonesia, where sessions were co-designed with local professionals and embedded within local institutional workflows. These formats welcome friction, encourage critical dialogue, and often produce new frameworks that feed back into the original training programs. To that extent, France Muséums modular pedagogic plan is adaptative, auto-assessed and challenged. Same, in Abu Dhabi each training experience contributes to a wider, reflexive ecosystem where ideas are exchanged, re-examined, and translated into daily professional realities to serve the professional and the visitor.

Conclusion: Towards a situated and reflexive museology

Museums today are not static guardians of heritage but dynamic, evolving ecosystems, shaped as much by their collections and narratives as by the professionals who animate them.

Through its commitment to localized, participatory, and context-sensitive training strategies, France Muséums and Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism contribute to a new paradigm: one where capacity building is not an external “add-on” nor neutral activity. It is a strategic engine for transformation, shaping how institutions think, operate, and evolve. In Abu Dhabi, the long-standing partnership between France and the UAE has not only produced a museum of international stature, but it has also seeded a professional ecosystem rooted in collaboration, critical thinking, nurturing a generation of professionals who are co-authors of a global museology in the making. As MuseoPro and Bespoke programs have shown, models built in one place can resonate elsewhere if they remain atten-

tive to local specificities and shared values. France Muséums' recent engagements in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa signal this potential.

Ultimately, the museum of the 21st century must be more than a space of conservation or display. It must be a learning organization, reflexive, open-ended, and capacitated from within. And in that shared effort of our professional networks, across borders, languages, and institutions, lies the true promise of a situated, inclusive, and forward-thinking museology.

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ICOM, Museum Definition, adopted at the 1st ICOM General Assembly, Paris, 1946. Original text: "The word 'museum' shall be taken to mean any permanent institution which acquires, conserves and displays, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, collections of objects of cultural or scientific significance." See: ICOM, Museum Definition History.

From archaeological site to living lab: Jilin University's museum practical course as a Chinese model

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In the 21st century, China's museum sector has seen rapid growth, with 7046 museums registered by 2024, equating to a one museum per 200,000 people (National Cultural Heritage Administration, 2024). This surge has driven a growing demand for skilled museum professionals. However, despite the proliferation of university programs, employment rates remain low due to limited positions, low salaries, and significant regional disparities. A fundamental misalignment exists between university education and industry needs, particularly regarding interdisciplinary and applied skills, echoing the global challenges of academic/practice disconnect.

As a leading Chinese university and a key institution in Northeast China, Jilin University pioneered the establishment of its museology program (now officially titled Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies) in 1985, formally incorporating it into the archaeology department's core curriculum by 1987. To bridge the gap between academic training and industry requirements while enhancing undergraduate students' practical competencies, the department developed its signature Museum Practice Course (MPC), an immersive, practice-oriented pedagogical system that organizes structured field training across China's major museums. As of August 2025, the program has successfully trained 699 students by integrating archaeological fieldwork with museum-based internships. MPC provides professional training courses including collections management, exhibition development, educational programming, and cultural product design, fostering a learning environment where students are empowered to actively participate and collaborate with museum professionals.

This paper reviews the Museum Practice Course at Jilin University from 1987 to 2025, summarizes existing practical teaching experiences and explores an innovative training path for the cultivation of museum professionals, providing a replicable "Jilin Model" for global museum higher education.

Main argument

The Museum Practice Course at Jilin University offers an innovative pedagogical model that not only connects theoretical frameworks with applied museum practice but also develops professional skills through workplace engagement. This student-centered approach, characterized by active learning methodologies and institutional collaborations with museums, contributes a distinctly Chinese response to the persistent challenge of balancing academic rigor with practical industry demands, in the global discourse on critical pedagogy in museum studies.

Case study

The historical evolution of MPC at Jilin University

Since its establishment in 1985, the museology undergraduate program at Jilin University has developed a dual-track curriculum that systematically integrates archaeological and museology disciplines. The core curriculum of this program features specialized courses in both domains, including North-east China archaeology, Qin-Han Dynasty archaeology, ethnology, collections management, exhibition

design, museum education, and so on. To bridge academic and professional practice, experienced practitioners from various departments of regional museums were recruited to deliver discipline-specific lectures (Shi, 2023).

Over the four-decade development since its establishment in 1987, MPC has evolved through four phases: the exploratory period (1987-1993), developmental period (1994-2002), maturation period (2002-2019), and current innovation era (2020-present). The initial six years represented a tentative exploration phase characterized by fragmented internship content primarily dictated by host museums' immediate needs. Early activities ranged from designing basic exhibitions for local museums to occasional archaeological excavations and museum visits. During this formative stage, teaching staff from diverse academic backgrounds, including both archaeology and museology, supervised these internships. This resulted in a program that lacked distinct professional identity and coherent curricular focus.

The developmental period (1994-2002) witnessed the establishment of a more structured model combining museum internships with cultural heritage visits, emphasizing core competencies such as collection management, exhibition design, and museum guidance.

However, archaeological fieldwork persisted, with specific arrangements still largely determined by host museums. This phase revealed significant operational challenges, particularly the heavy burden placed on faculty supervising three-month fieldwork placements while balancing other teaching and research obligations. This situation proved particularly problematic in research-intensive universities in China where academic productivity was prioritized as the primary metric for faculty evaluation and advancement.

The cornerstone came in 2002 when visitor research emerged as a signature part of the course, exemplified by a landmark study at Lüshun Prison Museum conducted jointly by students and faculty, subsequently published as a scholarly publication (Shi, 2023). The third period (2002-2019) then marked a significant breakthrough in reconciling academic research with practical training, establishing a sustainable model focused on core museum operations including conservation, exhibition development, educational programming, and visitor studies.

Entering the innovation era in 2020, MPC has undergone transformative changes reflecting contemporary museum priorities and participatory methodologies. The program lasts at least one academic semester in the third year of undergraduate studies. The current model adopts a student-centered approach, forging tripartite collaboration between universities, museums, and students to co-create the course. This new paradigm incorporates project-based learning, volunteer initiatives, and community engagement programs, while fostering critical thinking, teamwork, and ethical awareness. Through deep institutional partnerships that integrate research with pedagogy, MPC now systematically develops both professional competencies and social responsibility, preparing students to meet the evolving demands of museum practice.

Key characteristics of museum practicum courses

Bridging field archaeology to industry-driven museum practice

Several decades ago, programs of museology consistently emphasized professional practice and skills training, despite early debates about whether such education should be institution-based in museums or academia-based in universities (Lorente, 2012). Similarly, China's museum sector has developed under a pragmatic framework, with interdisciplinary and applied approaches to museology now widely integrated into higher education. The training of museum professionals must therefore balance theoretical foundations with practical competencies while addressing the evolving needs of China's museum industry.

China's museum landscape has expanded rapidly, with 213 new institutions established in 2024 alone (National Cultural Heritage Administration, 2024). Among these, comprehensive and history-themed museums constitute the majority (Liu, 2024), reinforcing a collections-centered approach that prioritizes the preservation, exhibition, research, and educational interpretation of historical artifacts. Consequently, the effective communication of archaeological discoveries has become a key focus for such institutions.

To address this need, the MPC program bridges field archaeology and museum practice through an innovative curricular framework. This strategic educational model demonstrates precise alignment with China's museum development paradigm, which remains fundamentally rooted in historical and cultural narratives. Leveraging Jilin University's strengths in archaeology, the curriculum incorporates hands-on courses such as archaeological theories, archaeological excavation, exhibition design, and public engagement programming. This practice-oriented approach ensures undergraduate students develop both the theoretical knowledge and applied skills necessary for contemporary museum work.

Research-teaching integration in museums

The formal establishment of museology as an academic discipline in China dated back to the 1930s, when Chinese scholars began developing distinctive Chinese museology approaches under international influence. This period saw crucial advancements in standardizing professional terminology, constructing theoretical frameworks, and developing methodologies with Chinese characteristics (Xü, 2014). Subsequent decades witnessed remarkable growth: seminal theoretical works emerged, professional associations matured, museums proliferated nationwide, and demand for qualified professionals intensified. Since the 1980s, over 50 Chinese universities have established museology programs, solidifying the discipline's position within higher education systems and securing a steady supply of qualified museum professionals.

However, traditional museology education has often prioritized theoretical knowledge over practical application, creating a disconnect with actual museum work. To address this gap, the School of Archaeology at Jilin University launched this MPC program, which transforms museums into dynamic learning laboratories. The program immerses students in hands-on experiences ranging from collections research to visitor studies while utilizing museum spaces, including exhibition halls, storage facilities, and conservation labs as active classrooms. This pioneering approach not only bridges theory and practice but also positions museums as testing grounds for experimental methodologies, ultimately advancing museology education toward greater specialization and practical relevance in China's evolving cultural landscape.

Museums, universities and students as co-innovators

The fundamental divergence between universities' educational missions and museums' public service roles creates both challenges and opportunities for designing museum practical programs. Conflicting expectations always exist. Academic institutions focus more on cultivating professional competencies through structured curricula, whereas museums prioritize visitor engagement and cultural interpretation (Kingsley, 2016). This often creates tension in museum practicum design as museums may assign routine operational tasks to meet immediate staffing requirements, while faculty emphasize pedagogical objectives that can inadvertently burden museum professionals with supervisory responsibilities.

Thus, the MPC has transformed traditional practicum models into dynamic collaborative processes starting from the initial design phase. The needs of all participants, including museums, faculty and students, are systematically evaluated to ensure mutual benefits throughout the internship process. In recent years, MPC no longer adopts the previous faculty-dominated curriculum development approach, but transitions to an empowerment framework, where museum professionals and students actively co-create internship structures and content through participatory discourses. While faculty retain

ultimate responsibility for curricular integration, this model can not only fulfill museums' operational requirements but also provide students with meaningful decision-making opportunities that deepen their practical engagement. Such immersive experiences can also significantly enhance students' professional competencies, self-efficacy, and career prospects (Hutchison et al., 2017).

In this age of information overload, students' self-awareness and social understanding have grown significantly, along with their learning and adaptability skills. This student-centered model enhances students' hands-on abilities, creativity, and comprehensive quality, and helps museums identify top talent early, building a strong talent pool for their future development.

Conclusion

This study presents Jilin University's Museum Practice Course as an inspiring model which attempts to address the global challenge of bridging academic training and museum practice. By integrating archaeological fieldwork with museum-based internships through collaboration between universities, museums and students, MPC offers a practical approach for how universities can cultivate adaptable professionals while meeting industry needs. While still evolving, this "Jilin Model" offers a replicable template for museum studies programs worldwide, particularly in contexts where cultural heritage interpretation dominates museum work. MPC's evolution underscores the transformative potential of reimagining museum education as a dynamic intersection of research, pedagogy, and professional practice.

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