

ICOFOM Study Series



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

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Vol. 54, Issue 1 – 2026

**Imagining the next generation
of museum professionals:
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**Imaginer la prochaine génération
de professionnels des musées :
combler les fossés, briser les barrières**

**Imaginar la próxima generación
de profesionales de los museos:
cerrar brechas, derribar barreras**

Guest editors:
Melissa Aguilar
Karen Brown
Supreo Chanda

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Preface

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The 27th ICOM General Conference, Dubai 2025, on the topic of “The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities,” held 11–14 November 2025, marked an important moment for ICOFOM. The ICOM Resolution on Empowering Museums in Achieving the SDGs and Climate Action Through Young People, submitted by our committee and endorsed by multiple others, was adopted by majority vote, helping to define ICOM’s mission for the next mandate. We also hosted our 48th Annual Symposium, on the pressing topic of “Imagining the Next Generation of Museum Professionals: Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers,” in collaboration with ICTOP and COMCOL. The 2025 Dubai conference benefited from an edited *Materials for Discussion*, which included many of the short papers presented at the symposium. In this edition of the *ICOFOM Study Series*, we have further collated seven expanded papers by invited authors, allowing longer discourses that focus in particular on the development of museum studies programmes in different locations around the world, as well as the impact and capabilities of new technologies in the sector.

Our symposium theme addressed how the theoretical and practical sides of training museum professionals have developed over recent decades. With over 250 master’s and doctoral-level programmes now offered globally, alongside alternative pathways such as internships and apprenticeships, our overarching research question was *Are today’s museum studies programs truly equipping professionals for the rapidly evolving needs of contemporary museums?* The symposium brought together papers that addressed pressing issues surrounding the training of tomorrow’s museum scholars and professionals, including:

- What are the ethical and practical implications of a field that is rapidly changing and a world that is in a constant challenge of redefining itself?
- 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?
- Most critically, are these programs truly aligning with what the museum sector needs today? How do these trainings connect theories and practices to offer critical perspectives on what museums are for?

Capacity building at the symposium

The symposium debate was framed through five key themes:

Theme 1 was on **museum studies and the curriculum**. Here we considered how curricula in Museum Studies vary significantly across the globe, and what drives these differences. How do we find the balance between theory and practice, or between broad generalisation and deep specialisation? Are universities providing too great an emphasis on practical skills, or are they churning out “over-qualified” graduates with little real-world readiness? Are

there better models for interactions between museums and museum-training institutions? In emerging museum sectors, what are the greatest needs, and how can curricula adapt to meet them? Moreover, who is shaping these curricula? How are educators trained, and what roles should international experts and local partners play in this process? Should there be global accreditation for museum studies programs, or would this overlook local needs and perspectives? How do we ensure that emerging theories and practices, particularly those from previously marginalised regions, can access the global stage? In the end, we focused on how theories shared in the curriculum represent the wide range of museum perspectives around the world without reproducing power asymmetries through knowledge.

Theme 2 probed **how museology has developed differently across languages, regions, and cultures**. How do these diverse approaches shape the field today? How can we ensure that a plurality of knowledge-making strategies, combining quantitative, qualitative, and philosophical approaches, are equally valued? As the field grows increasingly global, is there common ground in the balance between universal and local principles and practices? How do regions developing newly established museums draw from practices of other regions to shape their own approaches to museology? In brief, what are the different kinds of museologies around the world today, as we conclude the first quarter of the 21st century?

Theme 3, **diversifying programs and practices**, debated how the museum studies community can build a workforce as diverse as the audiences it serves. What is necessary to foster a truly inclusive environment, and what practices may hinder this goal? What does a decolonial or anticolonial partnership look like in practice, and who holds the power in shaping these partnerships? Political and diplomatic factors also come into play—how do they shape partnerships between institutions across borders, and how can diversity and inclusion become core values embedded in every aspect of museum work? We sought discussion on how to ensure that people from multiple backgrounds are not only represented but also actively shaping the stories museums tell, including by running museums themselves.

Theme 4, inspired by discussions within COMCOL, looked at **collecting as an act of care**. With the arrival of the new museum definition, the balance in the core tasks has also been redefined. Where in the past acquisition played a central role, with ownership a central theme, now the focus is on the act of collecting, the way we bring communities and their heritage together. These collaborative acts require different skills in relation building, as the practice of relationship care comes before the care of the object. How do shifting ideas about ownership and authority affect collecting and exhibiting practices? Collaborative and participatory collecting poses new ethical, legal, social, psychological, and museological questions that we were eager to address.

Finally, Theme 5, **building sector capacity**, focused on devising what strategies can help build long-term capacity in the museum sector. Apprenticeships, internships, and various qualifications are widely available, but do they create lasting change? How do we measure their impact beyond the immediate? Further, we wondered how training initiatives can promote leadership and self-advocacy, especially in emerging regions. How do we ensure that as the museum sector grows, it remains sustainable and adaptable to new challenges?

In this way, our multiple parallel sessions fostered dialogue among scholars, practitioners, educators, and students, addressing global and community-specific needs, diversity, decolonial methodologies, participatory collecting practices, and sustainable capacity building.

Capacity building in the ISS

Opening this expansive *ICOFOM Study Series* issue, then, Darko Babić examines the origins, evolution, and contemporary relevance of the Zagreb Museological School (one of Europe's most established museology programs). Beginning with Antun Bauer's foundational work in the 1950s, he traces the school's development through key figures and theoretical milestones, including Ivo Maroević's formalisation of museology as a scientific discipline and later innovations in heritage management and literacy. This chapter highlights Zagreb's unique integration of information and communication sciences and its adaptation to changing educational and professional landscapes. He highlights the school's ongoing efforts to balance global standards with local heritage realities. Through this historical and conceptual overview, Babić positions the Zagreb Museological School as a longstanding and forward-thinking model for museology education today.

Turning attention to Latvia, Baiba Tjarve et al. examine the concept and realities of professionalism in museum education there, drawing on a recent national survey of the staff of accredited museums. Although legislation expects museums to function as professional institutions, this study identifies a gap between these formal expectations and everyday practices. The authors argue that museum directors tend to view education primarily through a school-focused lens, valuing soft skills and digital competence over traditional pedagogical or subject-matter expertise when hiring educators. In their experience, by contrast, employment structures are fragmented, training is limited, and staff turnover is high. This situation complicates the professionalisation of museum educators, and the chapter argues that these mismatches warrant a rethinking of the roles and qualifications of museum educators in Latvia's changing museum landscape.

Moving the discourse to the African continent, Franck Ogou presents an overview of the strategic importance of training museum professionals in Africa, highlighting the critical role of the École du Patrimoine Africain (L'EPA) in Porto-Novo, Benin. This chapter outlines the EPA's evolution as a pan-African institution, its diverse training programs and practical teaching methods. It foregrounds its impact on heritage professionalisation and cooperation across the continent, including its achievements and current challenges, and it highlights future plans to expand its infrastructure and academic offerings. The chapter underscores this programme's significance as a means for innovation and integration in Africa's heritage sector.

Turning towards India, Juhi Sadiya provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution and current state of museology education and professional training on the subcontinent, highlighting the pioneering role of India in university museology teaching, which includes the high standard at the University of Calcutta. Drawing on institutional case studies, particularly from the Indian Institute of Heritage, it traces the historical development of the discipline, highlighting its institutional foundations, early influences, and the gradual shift from Eurocentric models to more context-sensitive, community-engaged approaches. The chapter discusses key challenges, including the limited number of training institutions, curricular constraints, and the persistent disconnect between academic theory and museum practice. It also examines recent innovations, including practice-based learning, community outreach, and decolonisation efforts, notably through case studies from the Indian Institute of Heritage. The author maintains that the future of museology in India depends on stronger integration of theory and practice, greater collaboration between museums and academic institutions, and the development of curricula grounded in local knowledge systems and community needs.

Turning attention toward gaps between current museum theory and the ways in which museum professionals are trained, Héctor Valverde analyses this dynamic in Mexico. Although global movements and declarations such as the landmark 1972 Santiago Roundtable have called for museums to become more socially engaged and community-centred, Valverde finds that Mexican training programs remain highly technical, focusing on conservation and exhibition design rather than on participatory or decolonial practices. His chapter approaches this problem through a review of program curricula, gathering feedback from graduates and revealing that while students understand the importance of community engagement, they lack the tools and methods to put it into practice in real-life scenarios after they graduate. The author argues for major curricular reforms in Mexican museum education, recommending more emphasis on participatory design, audience research, and applied learning. Valverde advocates preparing museum professionals who are not only technically skilled but also capable of working collaboratively with communities and adapting to the evolving role of museums in society.

Alexandra Bounia then explores the urgent need to redesign academic curricula for museum professionals in the era of post-digital museology, understood as an environment in which digital technologies are fully woven into museum practice and daily life, focusing on the case in Greece. Drawing on international studies, professional competency frameworks, and interviews with Greek museum professionals, this chapter highlights ongoing gaps in digital literacy and confidence and discusses strategic understanding among museum staff. The author advocates a shift away from purely technical training toward more interdisciplinary, learner-centred and—importantly—ethics-driven educational approaches. She outlines essential curricular themes to equip museum professionals to navigate contemporary institutional challenges and ensure museums remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Finally, Ya-Hsuan Wang explores how museum education must adapt to rapid technological and cultural changes, particularly the rise of generative Artificial Intelligence. Focusing on the gap between academic training and professional curatorial practice in Taiwan, her chapter showcases an undergraduate course as a case study which integrates double-loop learning and scaffolding theory, positioning AI as a learning tool to help students develop curatorial judgment, narrative coherence, and critical engagement, rather than a replacement for human curatorship. Through project-based tasks on local food and cultural memory, students have combined AI-supported exploration, collaborative writing, and scenario-based reflection in thought-provoking ways. The chapter highlights both the challenges and opportunities of using AI in museum education, emphasising the need for practice-oriented, adaptive pedagogy that goes beyond traditional theoretical frameworks. Wang concludes that embracing the tensions introduced by LLMs can cultivate the reflective and practical skills that are essential for future museum professionals.

The articles in this special issue highlight an emerging conversation in the museum studies field that bridges the gap between education and real-world museum needs, helping to imagine the next generation of museum professionals. In the spirit of the symposium, the issue brings together voices from across the globe to explore solutions, share strategies, and ultimately shape the future of museum training. Taken together, the seven contributions, spanning the globe, reveal that the central challenge facing museum education is no longer simply expanding access to professional training. The training is there. However, across highly diverse national and institutional contexts, the authors identify a common

concern: museum education must continually renegotiate the relationship between theory and practice, local needs and global conversations, technical expertise and social responsibility. Their proposed solutions converge in rejecting static conceptions of professional competence. Today's museum professional is increasingly expected to act not only as curator or collections specialist but also as educator, facilitator, community partner, ethical decision-maker, digital practitioner, and reflective learner.

At the same time, the issue challenges the assumption that there can—or should—be a single international model for museum studies. Authors' solutions differ according to context, some advocating more technical expertise, others more theory, others more training in community responsiveness. This is in itself a comment on the need for attention to the local. However, they also collectively argue for plural museologies: educational programmes grounded in local histories, cultures, and institutional realities while remaining connected to international theoretical debates. The symposium asked whether museum studies programmes are preparing professionals for rapidly changing museums; the contributions gathered here suggest that the answer lies less in standardising curricula than in cultivating adaptability and the capacity to respond creatively to changing conditions. In short, all are advocating for building the capacity for critical reflection into museum education programmes. In this sense, the future of museum education is defined not by universal consensus but by its ability to prepare professionals to navigate their own local complexities—and the complexities of a rapidly developing technological field—with confidence and purpose.

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Préface

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La 27e Conférence générale de l'ICOM, organisée à Dubaï du 11 au 14 novembre 2025 sur le thème « L'avenir des musées dans des communautés en mutation rapide », a constitué un temps fort pour l'ICOFOM. La résolution de l'ICOM intitulée « Donner aux musées les moyens d'atteindre les objectifs de développement durable (ODD), grâce aux jeunes, par l'inclusion sociale et l'action pour le climat », soumise par notre comité et soutenu par de nombreux autres, a été adoptée à la majorité, contribuant ainsi à définir la mission de l'ICOM pour le prochain mandat. Nous avons également organisé notre 48e symposium annuel, consacré à une thématique au cœur des enjeux contemporains : « **Imaginer la prochaine génération de professionnels des musées : Comblers les fossés, briser les barrières** », en collaboration avec l'ICTOP et le COMCOL. La conférence de Dubaï de 2025 a bénéficié de la publication d'une version éditée des Matériaux de discussion qui rassemblait un grand nombre des contributions présentées lors du symposium. Dans ce numéro de l'ICOFOM Study Series, nous avons réuni sept articles développés, rédigés par des auteurs et autrices invités, permettant des analyses approfondies portant notamment sur l'évolution des programmes de formation en études muséales dans différentes régions du monde, ainsi que sur l'impact des nouvelles technologies et les possibilités qu'elles offrent au domaine.

Le thème de notre symposium invitait à examiner l'évolution des aspects théoriques et pratiques de la formation des professionnels des musées au cours des dernières décennies. Avec plus de 250 programmes de master et de doctorat proposés dans le monde entier, ainsi que des parcours alternatifs tels que des stages et des apprentissages, une question a émergé : les programmes d'études muséales actuels préparent-ils réellement les professionnels aux besoins en constante évolution des musées contemporains ? Le symposium a réuni des contributions consacrées aux défis actuels et aux questions majeures liés à la formation des futurs chercheurs et professionnels de musées, notamment :

- Quels sont les enjeux éthiques et pratiques d'un domaine en mutation rapide dans un monde constamment appelé à se redéfinir ?
- Formons-nous un trop grand nombre de diplômés pour un nombre insuffisant de postes, ou subsiste-t-il encore d'importantes lacunes dans l'offre de formation, notamment dans les régions les moins pourvues ?
- En outre, ces programmes correspondent-ils véritablement aux besoins du domaine muséal contemporain ? Comment ces formations articulent-elles théorie et pratique afin de proposer des perspectives critiques sur les finalités mêmes du musée ?

Le développement des compétences lors du symposium

Les débats du symposium se sont structurés autour de cinq grands axes.

Le premier axe s'est porté sur les **études muséales et les programmes d'enseignement**. Nous avons cherché à comprendre pourquoi les cursus d'études muséales varient aussi drastiquement d'un pays à l'autre et quels facteurs motivent ces différences. Comment trouver un équilibre entre théorie et pratique, ou entre une formation généraliste et une spécialisation approfondie ? Les universités accordent-elles une place excessive aux compétences pratiques ou, au contraire, forment-elles des diplômés « surqualifiés » mais insuffisamment préparés aux réalités professionnelles ? Existe-t-il de meilleurs modèles de collaboration entre les musées et les établissements de formation muséale ? Dans les domaines muséaux en développement, quels sont les besoins les plus urgents et comment les programmes d'enseignement peuvent-ils s'y adapter ? Par ailleurs, qui élabore ces programmes ? Comment les enseignants et les formateurs sont-ils eux-mêmes formés, et quel rôle les experts internationaux et les partenaires locaux devraient-ils jouer dans ce processus ? Faudrait-il instaurer une accréditation internationale des programmes d'études muséales, ou celle-ci risquerait-elle de négliger les besoins et les perspectives propres aux différents contextes locaux ? Comment garantir que les théories et les pratiques émergentes, notamment celles provenant de régions auparavant marginalisées, puissent accéder à une visibilité internationale ? Enfin, nous nous sommes intéressés à la manière dont les théories enseignées dans les programmes de formation reflètent la grande diversité des approches muséales à travers le monde, tout en évitant de reproduire des rapports de pouvoir inégaux par la création et transmission des connaissances.

Le deuxième axe a exploré la **diversité des trajectoires suivies par la muséologie selon des contextes linguistiques, régionaux et culturels variés**. Comment ces différentes perspectives façonnent-elles aujourd'hui le domaine ? Comment garantir qu'une pluralité de modes de production des connaissances, associant des démarches quantitatives, qualitatives et philosophiques, soit reconnue et valorisée de manière équitable ? À mesure que la discipline se mondialise, peut-on trouver un équilibre entre des principes et des pratiques partagés à l'échelle internationale et des approches enracinées dans les contextes culturels, sociaux et institutionnels propres à chaque territoire ? Comment les régions où de nouvelles institutions muséales voient le jour s'inspirent-elles des pratiques développées ailleurs pour élaborer leurs propres orientations en matière de muséologie ? En somme, quelles sont les différentes formes de muséologie qui existent à l'échelle internationale au terme du premier quart du XXI^e siècle ?

Le troisième axe, consacré à la **diversification des programmes et des pratiques**, s'est interrogé sur la manière dont le milieu des études muséales peut contribuer à constituer un corps professionnel aussi diversifié que les publics auxquels il s'adresse. Quelles conditions sont nécessaires pour instaurer un environnement véritablement inclusif, et quelles pratiques risquent au contraire de faire obstacle à cet objectif ? À quoi ressemble concrètement une collaboration décoloniale ou anticoloniale, et qui détient le pouvoir de définir et de structurer de tels collaborations ? Les enjeux politiques et diplomatiques constituent également un facteur déterminant. Comment orientent-ils les partenariats entre institutions de différents pays, et comment inscrire la diversité et l'inclusion au cœur de l'ensemble des pratiques muséales ? Nous avons souhaité interroger les conditions permettant à de garantir à des personnes issues de milieux divers d'être non seulement représentées dans les institutions, mais participent aussi activement à l'élaboration des récits proposés par les musées, y compris en occupant elles-mêmes des fonctions de direction.

Le quatrième axe, inspiré par les discussions menées au sein du COMCOL, envisageait **la collecte comme un acte de soin**. Avec l'adoption de la nouvelle définition du musée, l'équilibre entre les fonctions fondamentales des institutions muséales a également été redéfini. Alors que l'acquisition occupait autrefois une place centrale et que la propriété constituait une préoccupation majeure, l'attention se porte désormais davantage sur l'acte de collecter en lui-même, c'est-à-dire sur la manière de réunir les communautés et leur patrimoine. Ces démarches collaboratives nécessitent de nouvelles compétences pour nouer et entretenir des relations, puisque le soin apporté à ces dernières précède désormais celui apporté aux objets. Comment l'évolution des notions de propriété et d'autorité influe-t-elle sur les pratiques de collecte et d'exposition ? Les démarches collaboratives et participatives de collecte soulèvent de nouvelles questions éthiques, juridiques, sociales, psychologiques et muséologiques que nous étions particulièrement désireux d'aborder.

Enfin, le cinquième axe a examiné **les stratégies susceptibles de renforcer durablement les compétences et les ressources du secteur muséal**. Les apprentissages, les stages et diverses formes de qualification sont largement accessibles, mais produisent-ils des changements durables ? Comment mesurer leur incidence au-delà de leurs effets immédiats ? Nous nous sommes également demandé comment les dispositifs de formation pouvaient favoriser la prise de responsabilité et la capacité des professionnels à défendre leurs propres intérêts, notamment dans les régions en cours de structuration. Comment garantir que, tout en poursuivant son développement, le domaine muséal demeure durable et capable de s'adapter à de nouveaux défis ?

Ainsi, la diversité des sessions proposées ont favorisé le dialogue entre chercheurs, professionnels, enseignants et étudiants autour des besoins globaux et communautaires, de la diversité, des méthodologies décoloniales, des pratiques participatives de collecte et du renforcement durable des compétences.

Le développement des compétences dans l'*ICOFOM Study Series*

En ouverture de ce vaste numéro de l'*ICOFOM Study Series*, Darko Babić examine les origines, l'évolution et la pertinence contemporaine de l'École de muséologie de Zagreb (l'un des plus anciens programmes de muséologie d'Europe). Partant des travaux fondateurs menés par Antun Bauer dans les années 1950, il retrace le développement de l'École à travers ses principales figures et ses jalons théoriques, notamment la formalisation de la muséologie comme discipline scientifique par Ivo Maroević, ainsi que ses évolutions ultérieures dans les domaines de la gestion du patrimoine et de la transmission des savoirs patrimoniaux. Ce chapitre met en lumière l'intégration singulière des sciences de l'information et de la communication au sein de l'École de Zagreb, ainsi que sa capacité d'adaptation à l'évolution des contextes éducatifs et professionnels. Il souligne également les efforts continus de l'École pour concilier les normes internationales avec les réalités patrimoniales locales. À travers ce panorama historique et conceptuel, Babić présente l'École de muséologie de Zagreb comme étant encore aujourd'hui un modèle d'enseignement de la discipline, ancré de longue date et résolument tourné vers l'avenir.

L'étude consacrée à la Lettonie, conduite par Baiba Tjarve et ses coauteurs, analyse la manière dont le professionnalisme est pensé et mis en œuvre dans le domaine de l'éducation muséale, en s'appuyant sur une récente enquête nationale menée auprès du personnel des musées accrédités. Bien que la législation exige des musées qu'ils fonctionnent comme des institutions professionnelles, l'étude met en évidence un décalage entre ce cadre normatif

et les pratiques quotidiennes. D'après les auteurs, les responsables de musées tendent à envisager la formation comme principalement basé sur un modèle scolaire, en privilégiant, lors du recrutement d'éducateurs, les compétences relationnelles et numériques plutôt que les compétences pédagogiques traditionnelles ou l'expertise disciplinaire. Or, dans la pratique, les structures d'emploi sont fragmentées, les possibilités de formation sont limitées et le taux de renouvellement du personnel est élevé. Cette situation complique la professionnalisation des éducateurs de musée. L'article soutient ainsi que ces décalages rendent nécessaire une réévaluation des fonctions et des qualifications de ces professionnels dans le paysage muséal letton en mutation.

Déplaçant la réflexion vers le continent africain, Franck Ogou présente une vue d'ensemble de l'importance stratégique de la formation des professionnels des musées en Afrique, en mettant en évidence le rôle essentiel de l'École du Patrimoine Africain (EPA), située à Porto-Novo, au Bénin. L'article retrace l'évolution de l'EPA en tant qu'institution panafricaine et présente la diversité de ses programmes de formation ainsi que ses méthodes d'enseignement pratique. Il met au premier plan son incidence sur la professionnalisation des métiers du patrimoine et sur la coopération à l'échelle du continent, en évoquant à la fois ses accomplissements, les défis auxquels elle est actuellement confrontée et ses projets d'expansion future en matière d'infrastructures et d'offre académique. L'auteur souligne ainsi l'importance de ce programme comme vecteur d'innovation et d'intégration dans le secteur patrimonial africain.

Se tournant ensuite vers l'Inde, Juhi Sadiya propose une présentation approfondie de l'évolution et de l'état actuel de l'enseignement de la muséologie et de la formation professionnelle dans le sous-continent. Elle souligne le rôle précurseur de l'Inde dans l'enseignement universitaire de la muséologie, notamment le niveau d'excellence atteint à l'Université de Calcutta. À partir d'études de cas consacrées à plusieurs institutions, notamment celle de l'Indian Institute of Heritage, l'article retrace l'évolution de la discipline, en mettant en évidence les bases institutionnelles sur lesquelles elle s'est construite, ses premières influences ainsi que sa transition progressive partant de modèles eurocentrés vers des approches plus sensibles aux contextes locaux et à l'implication des communautés. L'article analyse plusieurs défis majeurs, notamment le nombre limité d'établissements de formation, les contraintes liées aux programmes d'enseignement et la déconnexion persistante entre théorie universitaire et pratique muséale. Il examine également des innovations récentes, telles que l'apprentissage fondé sur la pratique, le développement des relations auprès des communautés et les démarches actives de décolonisation, notamment à partir d'études de cas menées à l'Indian Institute of Heritage. L'autrice soutient que l'avenir de la muséologie en Inde dépend d'une articulation plus étroite entre théorie et pratique, d'une collaboration accrue entre les musées et les établissements universitaires, ainsi que de l'élaboration de programmes d'enseignement ancrés dans les systèmes de savoir locaux et les besoins des communautés.

S'intéressant aux écarts entre la théorie muséale contemporaine et les modalités de formation des professionnels des musées, Héctor Valverde analyse cette dynamique au Mexique. Bien que des mouvements internationaux et des déclarations de référence, tels que la Table ronde de Santiago de 1972, aient appelé les musées à renforcer leur engagement social et à placer les communautés au cœur de leur action, Valverde constate que les programmes de formation mexicains demeurent essentiellement axés sur des aspects techniques. Ils privilégient la conservation et la conception d'expositions plutôt

que les pratiques participatives ou décoloniales. Son article aborde cette question à travers l'examen des programmes d'enseignement et la collecte de témoignages de diplômés. Il révèle que, si les étudiants ont conscience de l'importance de la participation des communautés, ils ne disposent ni des outils, ni des méthodes nécessaires pour le traduire dans leur pratique professionnelle une fois diplômés. L'auteur plaide donc en faveur d'une importante refonte des programmes dans la formation muséale au Mexique, recommandant d'accorder une plus grande place à la conception participative, aux études des publics et à l'apprentissage appliqué. Valverde préconise de former des professionnels qui soient non seulement des techniciens, mais qui soient aussi capables de travailler en collaboration avec les communautés et de s'adapter à l'évolution du rôle des musées dans la société.

Alexandra Bounia expose ensuite le besoin urgent de repenser les programmes universitaires destinés aux professionnels des musées à l'ère de la muséologie postnumérique, entendue comme un environnement dans lequel les technologies numériques sont pleinement intégrées aux pratiques muséales comme dans la vie quotidienne. Son analyse porte plus particulièrement sur le cas de la Grèce. S'appuyant sur des études internationales, des référentiels de compétences professionnelles et des entretiens menés auprès de professionnels des musées grecs, cet article met en évidence des lacunes persistantes parmi le personnel des musées en matière de connaissances numériques, de confiance dans l'usage des technologies et de compréhension stratégique. L'autrice préconise de se défaire des formations exclusivement techniques au profit d'approches éducatives plus axées sur l'interdisciplinarité, centrées sur les apprenants et, surtout, guidées par des considérations éthiques. Elle identifie plusieurs axes essentiels que devraient intégrer les programmes de formation afin de préparer les professionnels des musées de relever les défis auxquels les institutions sont aujourd'hui confrontées et leur permettre de rester pertinents, inclusifs et à l'écoute des évolutions d'un environnement numérique en constante mutation.

Enfin, Ya-Hsuan Wang examine la manière dont la formation muséale doit s'adapter aux changements technologiques et culturels rapides, en particulier face à l'essor de l'intelligence artificielle générative. Se concentrant sur le décalage entre la formation universitaire et la pratique curatoriale professionnelle à Taïwan, son travail prend pour étude de cas un cours de premier cycle intégrant l'apprentissage en double boucle à la théorie de l'étagage. L'intelligence artificielle y est conçue comme un outil d'apprentissage permettant aux étudiants de développer leur jugement curatorial, leur capacité à produire des récits cohérents et leur engagement critique, plutôt que comme un substitut à l'expertise curatoriale humaine. Dans le cadre de projets consacrés à l'alimentation locale et à la mémoire culturelle, les étudiants ont mobilisé l'intelligence artificielle comme outil d'exploration, associant celle-ci à l'écriture collaborative et à une réflexion fondée sur des scénarios, suscitant des démarches particulièrement stimulantes. Cet article met en évidence aussi bien les difficultés que les possibilités liées à l'utilisation de l'IA dans la formation muséale, insistant sur la nécessité d'une pédagogie souple, orientée vers la pratique et qui dépasse les cadres théoriques traditionnels. Wang conclut que la prise en compte des tensions introduites par les grands modèles de langage (Large Language Models ou LLM) peut favoriser le développement des compétences réflexives et pratiques indispensables aux futurs professionnels des musées.

Les articles réunis dans ce numéro spécial mettent en lumière l'émergence d'une réflexion dans le champ des études muséales qui cherche à réduire l'écart entre la formation et

les besoins concrets des musées et contribue ainsi à imaginer la prochaine génération de professionnels. Dans l'esprit du symposium, ce numéro rassemble des voix venues du monde entier afin d'explorer des solutions, de partager des stratégies et, en définitive, de contribuer à façonner l'avenir de la formation muséale. Considérées dans leur ensemble, ces sept contributions, issues de différentes régions du monde, montrent que le principal défi auquel se trouve confrontée la formation muséale n'est plus seulement d'élargir l'accès à la formation professionnelle. Les dispositifs de formation existent désormais. Toutefois, dans des contextes nationaux et institutionnels extrêmement variés, les auteurs et autrices soulignent une préoccupation commune : la formation muséale doit constamment renégocier les rapports entre théorie et pratique, entre besoins locaux et débats internationaux, entre expertise technique et responsabilité sociale. Leurs propositions s'accordent sur la nécessité d'abandonner une vision immuable des compétences professionnelles. Le professionnel des musées d'aujourd'hui est de plus en plus appelé à agir non seulement comme conservateur ou spécialiste des collections, mais aussi comme éducateur, facilitateur, partenaire des communautés, acteur de décisions éthiques, praticien du numérique et apprenant engagé dans une démarche réflexive.

Dans le même temps, ce numéro conteste l'idée selon laquelle il pourrait, ou devrait, exister un modèle international unique pour les études muséales. Les solutions proposées par les auteurs et autrices varient en fonction des contextes : certains plaident en faveur d'un renforcement de l'expertise technique, d'autres d'un approfondissement de la théorie, et d'autres encore d'une formation plus attentive à la prise en compte des communautés. Ces divergences soulignent elles-mêmes la nécessité d'accorder une attention particulière aux réalités locales. Toutefois les autrices et auteurs défendent collectivement l'existence de muséologies plurielles : des programmes de formation ancrés dans les histoires, les cultures et les réalités institutionnelles locales, tout en dialoguant avec les débats théoriques internationaux. Le symposium posait la question suivante : les programmes d'études muséales préparent-ils adéquatement les professionnels à répondre aux mutations rapides des musées. Les contributions réunies ici suggèrent que la réponse ne se trouve pas tant dans l'uniformisation des programmes que dans le développement de l'adaptabilité et l'aptitude à réagir de manière créative à des contextes en évolution. En somme, tous défendent l'idée qu'il est essentiel de développer la réflexion critique au sein des programmes de formation muséale. Dans cette perspective, l'avenir de la formation muséale ne se définit pas par la recherche d'un consensus universel, mais par sa capacité à donner aux professionnels les moyens d'aborder, avec assurance et discernement les complexités de leurs propres contextes locaux, ainsi que celles d'un domaine technologique en pleine mutation.

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Prefacio

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La 27.^a Conferencia General del ICOM, celebrada en Dubái del 11 al 14 de noviembre de 2025 bajo el tema «El futuro de los museos en comunidades en rápida transformación», constituyó un momento importante para el ICOFOM. La Resolución del ICOM sobre el fortalecimiento del papel de los museos en la consecución de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible y la acción climática mediante la participación de las juventudes, presentada por nuestro comité y respaldada por varios otros, fue aprobada por mayoría, contribuyendo así a definir la misión del ICOM para el próximo mandato. Asimismo, organizamos nuestro 48.º Simposio Anual, dedicado al tema urgente «Imaginar la próxima generación de profesionales de los museos: superar brechas, derribar barreras», en colaboración con el ICTOP y el COMCOL. La conferencia de Dubái de 2025 contó con una edición revisada de los *Materiales para el debate*, que reunió muchos de los trabajos breves presentados durante el simposio. En este número de *ICOFOM Study Series*, hemos recopilado además siete artículos ampliados de autores invitados, que permiten desarrollar reflexiones más extensas centradas, en particular, en la evolución de los programas de estudios museales en distintas partes del mundo, así como en el impacto y las posibilidades de las nuevas tecnologías en el sector.

El tema de nuestro simposio abordó la manera en que las dimensiones teóricas y prácticas de la formación de profesionales de los museos han evolucionado durante las últimas décadas. En la actualidad, se ofrecen en todo el mundo más de 250 programas de maestría y doctorado, junto con vías alternativas de formación, como las pasantías y los programas de aprendizaje profesional. En este contexto, nuestra pregunta general de investigación fue la siguiente: ¿los programas actuales de estudios museales preparan verdaderamente a los profesionales para responder a las necesidades, en rápida evolución, de los museos contemporáneos? El simposio reunió contribuciones que abordaron cuestiones urgentes relacionadas con la formación de los investigadores y profesionales de los museos del mañana, entre ellas:

- ¿Cuáles son las implicaciones éticas y prácticas de un campo que se transforma rápidamente y de un mundo sometido al desafío constante de redefinirse?
- ¿Estamos saturando el mercado con demasiados graduados para un número insuficiente de puestos de trabajo, o siguen existiendo enormes carencias en las oportunidades de formación, especialmente en regiones vulnerables?
- Más importante aún, ¿estos programas responden verdaderamente a las necesidades actuales del sector museal? ¿De qué manera estas formaciones articulan la teoría y la práctica para ofrecer perspectivas críticas sobre las finalidades de los museos?

El fortalecimiento de capacidades durante el simposio

El debate del simposio se estructuró en torno a cinco temas fundamentales.

El tema 1 se centró en los estudios **museales y el currículo**. En este marco, analizamos por qué los planes de estudio de museología varían considerablemente en distintas partes del mundo y cuáles son los factores que explican estas diferencias. ¿Cómo podemos encontrar un equilibrio entre la teoría y la práctica, o entre una formación general amplia y una especialización profunda? ¿Las universidades otorgan un énfasis excesivo a las competencias prácticas o, por el contrario, producen graduados «sobrecalificados» pero escasamente preparados para las realidades del mundo profesional? ¿Existen mejores modelos de interacción entre los museos y las instituciones dedicadas a la formación museal? En los sectores museales emergentes, ¿cuáles son las necesidades más importantes y cómo pueden adaptarse los currículos para responder a ellas? Asimismo, ¿quiénes diseñan estos planes de estudio? ¿Cómo se forma a los docentes y qué funciones deberían desempeñar los expertos internacionales y los socios locales en este proceso? ¿Debería existir una acreditación mundial de los programas de museología o esta podría pasar por alto las necesidades y perspectivas locales? ¿Cómo podemos garantizar que las teorías y prácticas emergentes, en particular aquellas procedentes de regiones marginadas, accedan al escenario internacional? En última instancia, nos centramos en la manera en que las teorías transmitidas mediante el currículo pueden representar la amplia diversidad de perspectivas museales existentes en el mundo sin reproducir, a través del conocimiento, las asimetrías de poder.

El tema 2 examinó **la forma en que la museología se ha desarrollado de manera diferente según las lenguas, regiones y culturas**. ¿Cómo configuran actualmente el campo estos distintos enfoques? ¿Cómo podemos garantizar que una pluralidad de estrategias de producción de conocimiento, que combinen perspectivas cuantitativas, cualitativas y filosóficas, sea valorada en condiciones de igualdad? A medida que el campo adquiere un carácter cada vez más global, ¿es posible encontrar un terreno común que permita equilibrar los principios y prácticas universales y locales? ¿Cómo se nutren las regiones que están desarrollando nuevos museos de las prácticas de otras regiones para configurar sus propios enfoques museológicos? En síntesis, ¿cuáles son las distintas formas de museología que existen hoy en el mundo, al concluir el primer cuarto del siglo XXI?

El tema 3, dedicado a la **diversificación de los programas y las prácticas**, debatió cómo la comunidad de los estudios museales puede contribuir a formar un cuerpo profesional tan diverso como los públicos a los que sirve. ¿Qué se necesita para fomentar un entorno verdaderamente inclusivo y qué prácticas pueden obstaculizar este objetivo? ¿Cómo se materializa en la práctica una alianza decolonial o anticolonial y quién detenta el poder para dar forma a estas colaboraciones? También intervienen factores políticos y diplomáticos: ¿cómo configuran las alianzas entre instituciones situadas en distintos países y cómo pueden la diversidad y la inclusión convertirse en valores centrales incorporados a todos los ámbitos del trabajo museal? Procuramos promover una reflexión sobre cómo garantizar que las personas provenientes de múltiples contextos no solo estén representadas, sino que también participen activamente en la configuración de los relatos que presentan los museos, incluso mediante la dirección de las propias instituciones.

El tema 4, inspirado en las discusiones desarrolladas en el seno del COMCOL, examinó **la práctica de coleccionar como un acto de cuidado**. Con la adopción de la nueva definición de

museo, también se ha redefinido el equilibrio entre sus funciones fundamentales. Mientras que en el pasado la adquisición desempeñaba un papel central y la propiedad constituía una preocupación primordial, actualmente la atención se desplaza hacia el acto mismo de coleccionar y hacia la manera en que reunimos a las comunidades con su patrimonio. Estas acciones colaborativas requieren competencias diferentes para establecer y mantener relaciones, puesto que el cuidado de las relaciones precede al cuidado del objeto. ¿Cómo afectan las transformaciones en las concepciones de la propiedad y la autoridad a las prácticas de coleccionismo y exposición? El coleccionismo colaborativo y participativo plantea nuevas cuestiones éticas, jurídicas, sociales, psicológicas y museológicas que nos interesaba especialmente abordar.

Finalmente, el tema 5, dedicado al **fortalecimiento de las capacidades del sector**, se concentró en determinar qué estrategias pueden contribuir a desarrollar capacidades a largo plazo en el ámbito museal. Las pasantías, los programas de aprendizaje profesional y diversas titulaciones se encuentran ampliamente disponibles, pero ¿generan cambios duraderos? ¿Cómo podemos medir sus efectos más allá de los resultados inmediatos? Asimismo, nos preguntamos cómo las iniciativas de formación pueden promover el liderazgo y la capacidad de los profesionales para defender sus propios intereses, especialmente en las regiones emergentes. ¿Cómo podemos garantizar que, a medida que crece el sector museal, este continúe siendo sostenible y capaz de adaptarse a nuevos desafíos?

De este modo, nuestras numerosas sesiones paralelas fomentaron el diálogo entre investigadores, profesionales, docentes y estudiantes, al abordar necesidades tanto globales como específicas de las comunidades, la diversidad, las metodologías decoloniales, las prácticas participativas de coleccionismo y el fortalecimiento sostenible de las capacidades.

El fortalecimiento de capacidades en *ICOFOM Study Series*

Al abrir este amplio número de *ICOFOM Study Series*, Darko Babić examina los orígenes, la evolución y la relevancia contemporánea de la Escuela Museológica de Zagreb, uno de los programas de museología más consolidados de Europa. A partir del trabajo fundacional de Antun Bauer durante la década de 1950, el autor reconstruye el desarrollo de la Escuela a través de sus principales figuras e hitos teóricos, incluida la formalización de la museología como disciplina científica por parte de Ivo Maroević y las posteriores innovaciones en los campos de la gestión y la alfabetización patrimoniales. El capítulo destaca la singular integración de las ciencias de la información y la comunicación en el modelo de Zagreb, así como su adaptación a los cambiantes contextos educativos y profesionales. También subraya los esfuerzos continuos de la Escuela por equilibrar los estándares internacionales con las realidades del patrimonio local. Mediante esta revisión histórica y conceptual, Babić presenta a la Escuela Museológica de Zagreb como un modelo de larga trayectoria y, al mismo tiempo, orientado hacia el futuro de la enseñanza de la museología.

Al dirigir la atención hacia Letonia, Baiba Tjarve y sus coautores examinan el concepto y las realidades del profesionalismo en la educación museal, basándose en una reciente encuesta nacional realizada entre el personal de los museos acreditados. Aunque la legislación establece que los museos deben funcionar como instituciones profesionales, el estudio identifica una brecha entre estas expectativas formales y las prácticas cotidianas. Los autores sostienen que las direcciones de los museos tienden a concebir la educación principalmente desde una perspectiva centrada en la escuela y, al contratar educadores

museales, valoran las competencias transversales y digitales por encima de los conocimientos pedagógicos tradicionales o la experiencia disciplinar. En la práctica, sin embargo, las estructuras laborales están fragmentadas, las oportunidades de formación son limitadas y la rotación del personal es constante. Esta situación dificulta la profesionalización de los educadores museales. El capítulo sostiene, por tanto, que estos desajustes hacen necesario reconsiderar las funciones y las cualidades de dichos profesionales en el cambiante panorama museal de Letonia.

Trasladando la reflexión al continente africano, Franck Ogou presenta una visión general de la importancia estratégica de la formación de profesionales de los museos en África y destaca el papel fundamental de la École du Patrimoine Africain (EPA), ubicada en Porto-Novo, Benín. El capítulo describe la evolución de la EPA como institución panafricana, así como la diversidad de sus programas de formación y sus métodos de enseñanza práctica. Asimismo, pone de relieve su impacto sobre la profesionalización de los sectores del patrimonio y la cooperación en todo el continente, incluidos sus logros, los desafíos que enfrenta actualmente y sus planes futuros para ampliar tanto su infraestructura como su oferta académica. El capítulo subraya así la importancia de este programa como instrumento de innovación e integración en el sector patrimonial africano.

Al abordar el caso de la India, Juhi Sadiya ofrece una revisión integral de la evolución y del estado actual de la enseñanza de la museología y de la formación profesional en el subcontinente. Destaca el papel pionero desempeñado por la India en la enseñanza universitaria de la museología, incluido el alto nivel alcanzado en la Universidad de Calcuta. A partir de estudios de casos institucionales, particularmente del Indian Institute of Heritage, la autora reconstruye el desarrollo histórico de la disciplina y señala sus fundamentos institucionales, sus influencias iniciales y el tránsito gradual desde modelos eurocéntricos hacia enfoques más sensibles a los contextos locales y más comprometidos con las comunidades. El capítulo analiza desafíos fundamentales, entre ellos el número limitado de instituciones formadoras, las restricciones curriculares y la persistente desconexión entre la teoría académica y la práctica museal. También examina innovaciones recientes, como el aprendizaje basado en la práctica, la vinculación con las comunidades y los esfuerzos de descolonización, particularmente mediante estudios de casos del Indian Institute of Heritage. La autora sostiene que el futuro de la museología en la India depende de una mayor integración entre teoría y práctica, de una colaboración más estrecha entre los museos y las instituciones académicas, y del desarrollo de currículos fundamentados en los sistemas locales de conocimiento y en las necesidades de las comunidades.

Al centrar la atención en las brechas entre la teoría museal contemporánea y las formas en que se prepara a los profesionales de los museos, Héctor Valverde analiza esta dinámica en México. Aunque movimientos y declaraciones internacionales, como la histórica Mesa Redonda de Santiago de 1972, han exhortado a los museos a adoptar un mayor compromiso social y una orientación más centrada en las comunidades, Valverde concluye que los programas mexicanos de formación siguen siendo sumamente técnicos. Estos se concentran en la conservación y el diseño de exposiciones, en lugar de priorizar prácticas participativas o decoloniales. El capítulo aborda este problema mediante una revisión de los currículos de los programas y la recopilación de testimonios de sus egresados. Sus resultados revelan que, si bien los estudiantes comprenden la importancia de la participación comunitaria, después de graduarse carecen de las herramientas y los métodos necesarios para llevarla a la práctica en situaciones profesionales concretas. El autor

propone, por tanto, importantes reformas curriculares en la formación museal mexicana y recomienda conceder mayor énfasis al diseño participativo, los estudios de públicos y el aprendizaje aplicado. Valverde aboga por preparar profesionales que no solo posean competencias técnicas, sino que también sean capaces de trabajar colaborativamente con las comunidades y de adaptarse al cambiante papel de los museos en la sociedad.

Alexandra Bounia explora a continuación la urgente necesidad de rediseñar los currículos académicos destinados a profesionales de los museos en la era de la museología posdigital, entendida como un entorno en el cual las tecnologías digitales están plenamente integradas tanto en la práctica museal como en la vida cotidiana. Su análisis se centra particularmente en el caso de Grecia. A partir de estudios internacionales, marcos de competencias profesionales y entrevistas con profesionales de museos griegos, el capítulo identifica carencias persistentes en materia de alfabetización digital, confianza en el uso de las tecnologías y comprensión estratégica entre el personal de los museos. La autora propone abandonar las formas de capacitación exclusivamente técnicas en favor de enfoques educativos más interdisciplinarios, centrados en el aprendizaje y —de manera fundamental— guiados por principios éticos. Asimismo, identifica temas curriculares esenciales que permitirían a los profesionales afrontar los desafíos institucionales contemporáneos y garantizar que los museos continúen siendo relevantes, inclusivos y capaces de responder a un panorama digital en rápida transformación.

Finalmente, Ya-Hsuan Wang examina cómo debe adaptarse la educación museal a los acelerados cambios tecnológicos y culturales, particularmente al auge de la inteligencia artificial generativa. Al centrarse en la brecha entre la formación académica y la práctica curatorial profesional en Taiwán, su capítulo presenta como estudio de caso un curso de licenciatura que integra el aprendizaje de doble bucle y la teoría del andamiaje. En este curso, la inteligencia artificial se concibe como una herramienta de aprendizaje destinada a ayudar al estudiantado a desarrollar su criterio curatorial, la coherencia narrativa y la capacidad de análisis crítico, en lugar de funcionar como un sustituto de la curaduría humana. Mediante tareas basadas en proyectos sobre la alimentación local y la memoria cultural, los estudiantes combinaron de formas creativas la exploración asistida por IA, la escritura colaborativa y la reflexión basada en escenarios específicos. El capítulo pone de relieve tanto los desafíos como las oportunidades que presenta el uso de la IA en la educación museal y enfatiza la necesidad de una pedagogía adaptativa, orientada hacia la práctica y capaz de ir más allá de los marcos teóricos tradicionales. Wang concluye que asumir las tensiones introducidas por los Modelos de Lenguaje a Gran Escala (LLMs) puede contribuir al desarrollo de las competencias reflexivas y prácticas esenciales para los futuros profesionales de los museos.

Los artículos de este número especial ponen de manifiesto una conversación emergente en el campo de los estudios museales que busca reducir la distancia entre la educación y las necesidades concretas de los museos, contribuyendo así a imaginar la próxima generación de profesionales. En consonancia con el espíritu del simposio, este número reúne voces de distintas partes del mundo con el propósito de explorar soluciones, compartir estrategias y, en última instancia, contribuir a configurar el futuro de la formación museal. Consideradas en conjunto, las siete contribuciones, procedentes de diversos contextos geográficos, revelan que el desafío central al que se enfrenta la educación museal ya no consiste simplemente en ampliar el acceso a la formación profesional. La oferta de formación ya existe. Sin embargo, en contextos nacionales e

institucionales sumamente diversos, los autores identifican una preocupación común: la educación museal debe renegociar continuamente la relación entre teoría y práctica, necesidades locales y debates internacionales, conocimientos técnicos y responsabilidad social. Las soluciones propuestas convergen en su rechazo de concepciones estáticas de la competencia profesional. Se espera cada vez más que el profesional de los museos contemporáneo actúe no solo como curador o especialista en colecciones, sino también como educador, facilitador, colaborador entre comunidades, responsable de decisiones éticas, profesional del ámbito digital y sujeto de aprendizaje reflexivo.

Al mismo tiempo, el número cuestiona la suposición de que pueda—o deba—existir un único modelo internacional para los estudios museales. Las soluciones de los autores varían según el contexto: algunos defienden una mayor especialización técnica; otros, un mayor énfasis en la teoría; y otros, una formación más profunda para responder a sus contextos situados. Estas diferencias constituyen en sí mismas un argumento a favor de prestar atención a las realidades locales. No obstante, los autores también defienden colectivamente la existencia de museologías plurales: programas educativos arraigados en las historias, culturas y realidades institucionales locales, pero vinculados a los debates teóricos internacionales. El simposio indagó si los programas de estudios museales están preparando a sus profesionales para museos que cambian con rapidez. Las contribuciones reunidas aquí sugieren que la respuesta no reside tanto en la estandarización de los currículos como en el desarrollo de la adaptabilidad y de la capacidad para responder creativamente a condiciones cambiantes. En síntesis, todos los autores abogan por incorporar el desarrollo de la reflexión crítica a los programas de educación museal. En este sentido, el futuro de la formación museal no se define por la existencia de un consenso universal, sino por su capacidad para preparar a los profesionales a fin de que puedan desenvolverse, con confianza y sentido de propósito, tanto en las complejidades de sus propios contextos locales como en las de un campo tecnológico en acelerado desarrollo.

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On the Zagreb Museological School: Maybe we could make a difference

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Abstract

This paper examines the historical development, theoretical contributions, and future prospects of the Zagreb Museological School, one of Europe's longest-standing museology programmes. From Antun Bauer's pioneering work in the 1950s to Ivo Maroević's formalisation of museology as a scientific discipline and the school's contemporary focus on heritage management and literacy, it traces key intellectual developments. Drawing on the school's engagement with information sciences, museality, heritage interpretation, and educational reforms, the paper argues that its evolution offers a valuable model for museology education. It particularly addresses the tension between global standardisation and regional specificity, proposing that a middle way grounded in local heritage realities may be the most productive path forward. While not predicting the future, it focuses on the Zagreb School's contributions that serve as possible inspiration for how to proceed.

Key words: museology, Zagreb Museological School, heritage management, heritage literacy, information and communication sciences, museality, museum education

Resumen

Sobre la Escuela Museológica de Zagreb: Tal vez podamos marcar una diferencia. Este artículo examina el desarrollo histórico, las contribuciones teóricas y las perspectivas futuras de la Escuela Museológica de Zagreb, uno de los programas de museología más antiguos de Europa. Desde el trabajo pionero de Antun Bauer en la década de 1950 hasta la formalización de la museología como disciplina científica por parte de Ivo Maroević y el enfoque contemporáneo de la Escuela en la gestión y alfabetización del patrimonio, el estudio rastrea sus principales desarrollos intelectuales. Basándose en la relación de la Escuela con las ciencias de la información, la musealidad, la interpretación del patrimonio y las reformas educativas, el artículo sostiene que su evolución ofrece un modelo valioso para la educación museológica. En particular, aborda la tensión entre la estandarización global y la especificidad regional, proponiendo que una vía intermedia arraigada en las realidades patrimoniales locales puede

constituir el camino más productivo hacia el futuro. Sin pretender predecir el porvenir, el artículo se centra en las contribuciones de la Escuela de Zagreb, que pueden servir de inspiración para orientar los pasos a seguir.

Palabras clave: museología, Escuela Museológica de Zagreb, gestión del patrimonio, alfabetización patrimonial, ciencias de la información y la comunicación, musealidad, educación museológica

The year 1984 was yet another a leap year marked with so many important political or other events. But within museology it is the year when the Zagreb Museological School became official by establishing the Chair (Sub-Department) of Museology within the Department of Information Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the University of Zagreb (Croatia). Only two years later, the University of Zagreb started what was at that time an innovative and subject-specific academic study programme in museology (Vujić & Stublić, 2016).

The significance of 1984, however, can only be properly understood within the broader context of museological thought that had been developing in Zagreb for decades prior. The relationship between Zagreb and museology did not begin in 1984. It stretches back at least to the early 1950s, when the foundations were laid for what would become one of the distinctive traditions in European museological thinking. To understand how the Zagreb Museological School arrived at its present configuration, and to consider where it might be heading, we must first examine these earlier roots in some detail.

Early foundations

Antun Bauer and the institutional origins of Croatian museology

The story of the Zagreb Museological School begins in earnest with Antun Bauer (1911–2000), an archaeologist, collector and museologist whose vision for the systematic organisation of museum knowledge in Croatia proved foundational. In 1955, Bauer established the Museum Documentation Centre (in Croatian Muzejski Dokumentacijski Centar, MDC) in Zagreb, a public institution with the mission to systematically collect, record and catalogue all materials related to museum development and activities within the entirety of what was then (the Socialist Republic of) Yugoslavia (Babić & Vujić, 2012). The MDC was, from the outset, conceived not merely as an archival repository but as an active centre for museological reflection and professional development. It remains operational to this day and continues to serve as a vital institutional resource for Croatian museums.

Even before establishing the MDC, Bauer had initiated cooperation with the University of Zagreb, delivering part-time lectures about the importance of museum work, at that time primarily in connection with the Art History Department. Indeed, as early as 1950, museology was taught as an elective course within the art history programme at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). Bauer's contribution to the publishing infrastructure of Croatian

museology was equally significant: he founded the journal *Muzeologija* (Museology) in 1953, which became the first Yugoslav academic journal dedicated to the field, and later initiated *Informatica Museologica*, published by the MDC from 1970 onwards (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). Both journals continue to be published, representing over seven decades of continuous scholarly production in museological thoughts, first in the ex-Yugoslavia, then from 1990 in (the Republic of) Croatia.

The critical institutional milestone came in 1966, when Bauer initiated the University Postgraduate Programme in Museology as part of the already existing Postgraduate Programme in Librarianship and Documentation Science. This programme was established with the support of Professor Božo Težak, a visionary in the field of information sciences in Croatia, who facilitated the integration of museology into the broader framework of documentation and information studies (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). The placement of museology alongside librarianship and documentation was not accidental; it reflected a deliberate conceptual alignment that would define the Zagreb approach for decades to come.

Bauer's inaugural lecture for the postgraduate programme, delivered on 13 December 1966 and published in the journal *Muzeologija* in 1967, provides a remarkable window into his theoretical commitments. In his lecture, Bauer defined the contemporary museum as an institution that functions as a “centre for documentation for its area, for a specific discipline, for a specific time period, for a specific territory or locality” (Bauer, 1967, p. 13). For Bauer, the main reason for developing museology as a science was not the museum institution per se, nor its functions, but foremost for collections and museum objects. In other words, the museum object was the object of knowledge as the document of the past. This orientation pushed museology decisively toward documentation and retrieval sciences, linking it intellectually and institutionally to librarianship (Vujić & Stublić, 2016).

Particularly noteworthy in Bauer's lecture is his engagement with the debate about whether the museum object should be understood as subject or object of knowledge. Drawing upon the 1931 Paris inquiry (*Revue Magazine*) and especially the revolutionary contribution of Theodor Schmidt of Leningrad University, Bauer argued that the museum object must not be valorised as a “work of creative genius and superhuman beauty” but as a “precious historical document” (1967, pp. 10–11). A key principle of the Zagreb School was the distinction between museum objects valued as aesthetic ends in themselves and museum objects understood as sources of knowledge within a wider documentary and interpretive framework. Bauer noted that both modes coexist in practice—a painting, for instance, may function as a subject in a gallery setting and as an object of historical cognition in a cultural-history museum—where he insisted that the documentary dimension is/was fundamental to museological science.

It is also worth noting that the initial proposals for the 1966 postgraduate courses did not include museology only, but also topics related to the protection of natural heritage sites.

This early interconnection of cultural and natural heritage was thus embedded in the Zagreb Museological School from its very beginning. Bauer was intellectually close to a group of museologists from East Germany who published their theses on museum science in the journal *Museumskunde*. For them, museum science was an autonomous discipline that belonged to the field of documentation, together with archives and libraries—a position that clearly resonated with Bauer's own convictions about the documentary

essence of museum work (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). By these early theoretical commitments and institutional arrangements, A. Bauer established the (sort of) pre-DNA of what would later crystallise as the Zagreb Museological School: a tradition in which museology is fundamentally oriented toward documentation, information, and the epistemic status of heritage objects. If we use Maroević's terms (1993), we could say it remarks the proto-phase of museology/heritage studies development at the University of Zagreb. The idea of museology was still blurry in this period, more the feeling that there are some things which do have potential and less a plan for how to proceed, more looking at what others were doing compared to producing its own ideas. However, this work set the stage for further developments and therefore is not something to be ashamed of. Up to (even later in) the 1970s there were only a few fully established museology/museums studies programmes around the world, and scientific production in general was still pretty low.

Ivo Maroević and the formalisation of museology as a scientific discipline

If Bauer laid the institutional and conceptual groundwork, it was Ivo Maroević (1937–2007) who gave the Zagreb Museological School its definitive theoretical architecture. An art historian by education, and with deep connections to conservation practice, Maroević felt there was always more to say, think, and do regarding museums and heritage. His intellectual trajectory brought him to a conviction that information sciences constituted the natural environment for the development of museology—a conviction that was formally recognised in 1983 when museology was established as a scientific discipline within the field of social sciences in the then-Yugoslav, currently Croatian classification of scientific disciplines (Babić & Vujić, 2012).

In 1984, Maroević established the Museology Sub-Department within the Department of Information Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb), and in 1986 welcomed the first generation of undergraduate students into the museology programme, which functioned as one of the specialised professional orientations within the department alongside librarianship, archive sciences, and informatics (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). The programme was formed within a four-year information sciences diploma basis, as well as an additional (external) two-year supplementary academic programme.

Maroević's most enduring intellectual contribution lies in his specification of the scientific character of museology, the scope of museological research, and the definition of fundamental terms. Working from 1983 to 1993 on his major theoretical synthesis and drawing upon the tenets of European museologists, primarily Peter van Mensch and Zbyněk Stránský, as well as the leading Croatian theoreticians of information sciences such as Miroslav Tuđman, Maroević arrived at a definition of museology that has been widely (though globally only partly) recognised in the international museum community. In his seminal book *Uvod u muzeologiju* (1993), later translated (and partly adapted) into English, he 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 and Vujić, 2012; Maroević, 1998)

This definition anchored the Zagreb Museological School firmly within information and (later) communication sciences. It is notable for several reasons. First, it positioned museology not as a study of museum institutions but as a quality of museality which exists in objects and environments regardless of whether they reside within museum walls. Second, it established a tripartite functional framework around identification and research, preservation, and communication. Third, it explicitly connected museological research to the broader humanistic and social sciences mission of preserving human heritage and interpreting its significance.

The concept of museality, central to Maroević's system, has its origins in the Central European museological tradition, specifically in the work of the Czech museologist Zbyněk Z. Stránský (1926-2016), who coined the term in the late 1960s. Stránský defined museality as a quality of reality that is essential to human experience, one that must be protected from "general and normal disintegration" (Stránský, as cited in van Mensch, 2015, p. 16). In 1970, Stránský's theory was introduced to Croatian readers through the text "The Concept of Museology" published in the journal *Muzeologija*. Maroević developed this concept further, interpreting museality as a set of characteristics of objects, environments, and phenomena that witness another reality: a chronological or social context from which they were taken and to which they refer. In contemporary terms, museality covers multiple layers of meaning and attributed values detectable in diverse entities recognised as heritage (Babić & Vujić, 2012).

Drawing on the information-science theories of Miroslav Tuđman, Maroević further proposed a model of the museum object as a sign, articulating the differences between information-based, documentation-based, and communication-based approaches to the museum object. He identified three constitutive components of museum objects: the material (reflecting the object's duration through time), the form (reflecting the existence and dissemination of the object's messages in space), and the meaning (reflecting the entrance of the object into the awareness and knowledge of the community) (Maroević, 1998). He regularly presented these ideas at annual ICOFOM and ICTOP conferences, where in part they became integral to international museological discourse.

It is not irrelevant to mention here some of the globally important persons contributing toward the development of museology in the late 20th century who were strongly connected to the Zagreb Museological School. The most notable was Professor Peter van Mensch, who defended his PhD thesis *Towards a Methodology of Museology* at the University of Zagreb in 1992 under the supervision of Maroević. The fact that a scholar of van Mensch's stature had Zagreb as the institutional home for his doctoral research speaks itself toward the international standing that the school had achieved by the early 1990s.

However, an honest assessment must also acknowledge certain limitations. As Vujić and Stublić (2016) have noted, time has shown that many of Maroević's museological premises were never fully applied to museum practice, something they regard as critically important factors for an analytical discipline. Some of his concepts, particularly the distinctions between information-based, documentation-based, and communication-based approaches to the museum object, appear to have remained somewhat enclosed within themselves, not always encouraging further development of museological thought. Nevertheless, Maroević's definition of museology and his elaboration of museality remain foundational reference points in international museological discourse and strongly mark

the development of the Zagreb Museological School. It was during this period when the Zagreb School stepped onto the European, or indeed the global, stage. This phase could be defined as the main formation of the Zagreb Museological School, setting the core, which is still present today, no matter how many changes have happened in the meantime.

New directions

Tomislav Šola, community engagement, and the idea of a mega-profession

In the middle 1990s, when Croatia had already become an independent state, the Zagreb Museological School began to incorporate new intellectual currents, largely through the influence of Tomislav Šola. His scholarship in France in the late 1970s profoundly influenced his intellectual production and oriented him toward the French ideas connected to community engagement, particularly the eco-museum concept. Šola's contribution to the Zagreb School was multifaceted. He coined the terms *heritology* (1982) and *mnemosophy* (1987) to designate broader theoretical frameworks that would encompass and transcend traditional museology, arguing that the field needed to address the entire spectrum of heritage and public memory, not merely its museum-based instantiations. He advocated for what he called a mega-profession, a sort of unified professional field that would embrace all work done in museums, galleries, archives, and libraries (GLAM). This integrative vision challenged the disciplinary silos that had traditionally separated these cognate fields and anticipated developments that would only gain wider traction in the international heritage community decades later (Šola, 2003).

Perhaps equally significant was Šola's founding of The Best in Heritage in 2002, an annual conference/survey of award-winning museum, heritage, and conservation projects held in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Through this initiative and by his extensive publication record, including the book *Eseji o muzejima i njihovoj teoriji: prema kibernetičkom muzeju* (Essays on museums and their theory: Towards a cybernetic museum, 2003), Šola extended the international reach of the Zagreb Museological School and reinforced its reputation as a centre for innovative, socially engaged museological thinking. This phase has been marked by further studies on internalisation. While the eco-museological ideas and connected sociomuseology were not globally new, their introduction to previous concepts of the Zagreb School made a significance difference and indirectly pushed the school toward heritage studies.

Žarka Vujić and applied museological research in Croatia

It would be unfair not to mention a significant contribution made by Professor Žarka Vujić to the main ideas established within the Zagreb Museological School. Vujić conducted numerous research projects directly applied to the Croatian museum landscape. Her seminal book *Izvori muzeja u Hrvatskoj* (2007) provided the first comprehensive historical account of how museums emerged and evolved in the Croatian context, filling a critical gap in national museum/heritage scholarship.

Beyond historical research, Vujić made important contributions to the theoretical refinement of the Zagreb School's foundational concepts. Together with her colleagues, she altered Maroević's understanding of museology by introducing the element that assigns meaning and creates a sign—the interpreter, understood as the human who mediates between

objects and heritage meanings (Vujić, 1999). This modification, which foregrounded the role of diverse agents (those who select and proclaim heritage, professionals who research and interpret/present it, and visitors who experience it), represented a significant shift toward recognising the centrality of interpretation in museological processes, which led to a reformulated definition of museology as it is understood in Croatia today:

Museology belongs to the field of information and communication sciences, and it investigates meanings and identities (resulting from the construction) of heritage, its protection, interpretation, and communication, as well as forms of institutional activities that are based on these functions (even museums), in order to maintain sustainable social use of heritage and well-being. (Vujić & Stublić, 2016, p. 43)

Vujić also opened important research avenues related to visitors' experience, museum management, and museum architecture, thereby ensuring that the Zagreb School maintained a productive dialogue between theoretical sophistication and practical applicability. Her work on the semiotics of museum objects and collecting (Vujić, 1999) further strengthened the school's engagement with communication theories, an engagement that proved prescient as the parent discipline evolved from information sciences to information and communication sciences in the Croatian academic classification. The importance of Vujić's contribution is twofold: she explored in depth the Croatian origins of museum work, while at the same time she opened new questions for inquiry. The first is by far more important for further development of the Zagreb Museological School, since without being aware how the museum work has been historically developed all ideas about future development are partly futile.

The ALM Conference and interdisciplinary dialogue

A distinctive feature of the Croatian museological landscape, and one that directly reflects the institutional embedding of museology within information and communication sciences, is the Archives, Libraries and Museums (ALM) conference first held in 1996. Known in Croatian as AKM (*Arhivi, Knjižnice, Muzeji*), this unique conference series, the only one of its kind in Southeastern Europe, was initiated by the Croatian library community and quickly became a vital platform for a cross-disciplinary dialogue among heritage information professionals (Vujić & Stublić, 2016).

It was at the first the ALM conference that Maroević presented one of his most significant theoretical contributions: a comparative definition of collected items in museums, libraries, and archives using his model of the museum object as sign. He proposed that museum objects derive their value equally from three components (material, form, and meaning), while archival material depends above all on material and meaning, and books primarily on content or meaning (Maroević, 1998). The ALM conference also provided the setting in which a crucial distinction crystallised: through sustained engagement with archive and library professionals, the Zagreb museologists came to articulate a key insight that museums, galleries, and similar institutions are not primarily *information* institutions but *interpretive* institutions. While they enable visitors to encounter collected materials and give access to study collections, their distinctive function lies in using various interpretive strategies to shape communication products—exhibitions, publications, educational materials—for their audiences (Vujić & Stublić, 2016). This insight would prove formative for the school's subsequent turn toward heritage interpretation, heritage management and heritage literacy as central pedagogical and research concerns.

The Bologna Reform and the Master in Museology and Heritage Management

In 2006, pushed by so-called the Bologna reform the Zagreb Museological School made a significant change shifting toward new topics. The ex-master programme focused only on museology (as a specialisation) became the Master in Museology and Heritage Management, which doubled or almost tripled the interest of students to attend it (Babić & Vujić, 2012). This was not merely a cosmetic adjustment but reflected substantial changes in the content and orientation of the curriculum.

Part of why we changed (and extended) the master's programme in 2006 was related to greatly increased demand that we detected within the tourism sector (heritage and cultural tourism) as well as the initial establishment of private consultancy companies working in the field of heritage. The broadened university programme responded to these market realities while simultaneously aligning with the school's own evolving theoretical commitments. The programme now incorporated courses on heritage interpretation, cultural tourism, heritage policies, community engagement and management practices alongside the traditional museological core of collection theory, documentation and museum communication. This period is marked with yet another transition, more administrative than conceptual, as in 2013 the Republic of Croatia entered the European Union (EU), which changed some market-related job demands (including in the museums/heritage sector). After it all Croatian museum/heritage students could work in any EU country and EU students/youth could work in Croatia without necessary additional working permits.

Heritage literacy, critical heritage studies, and the contemporary Zagreb School

During the second decade of the 21st century the Zagreb Museological School has further embraced the importance of diverse community engagement, which includes topics such as heritage literacy, as a kind of universal human/heritage right (Babić et al., 2019), supported by the idea of multifaceted heritage communities as articulated in the Council of Europe's Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, known as the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005), and indirectly by the emerging field of gender museology.

The concept of heritage literacy as developed within the Zagreb School addresses a fundamental asymmetry in heritage discourse. While heritage as an economic resource is generally recognised and valued, heritage as knowledge is incomparably less discussed, even though it is in fact a prerequisite for economic exploitation; the last is particularly valid for tourist countries/destinations such as Croatia. As Laurajane Smith (2006) has argued, heritage undergoes a kind of "manipulation" and becomes "subjected to the management and preservation/conservation process, not because it simply 'is'" (p. 3). Heritage is, in other words, a specific form of management of values and meanings, so heritage and heritage-related knowledge management are inseparable categories. This understanding brings us back to Maroević's concept of museality. If heritage does not possess intrinsic values but rather acquires them through processes of identification, selection, and attribution, then the capacity of individuals and communities to understand and navigate these processes becomes critically important. Heritage literacy, as the Zagreb School conceives it, is a systematic, global, lifelong and holistic process in which every individual and group must have an inalienable and guaranteed right to participate in

heritage, benefit from it and use it. This right aligns with that of self-definition, self-esteem, and the right to create one's own singular experience out of the pool of an endless collective human heritage (Babić & Vujić, 2012). Heritage literacy, led by contemporary understanding of heritage interpretation (but not only by it), is the only possible way to empower people/communities over time to use their heritage in a way they consider the most appropriate and the best for their own future development.

The introduction of critical heritage studies as an important strand within the Zagreb museological curriculum was driven in part by the importance of tourism for the Croatian economy and the often-questionable impact of tourism upon heritage and local communities. But it also reflected a deeper intellectual engagement with scholars such as Laurajane Smith, whose concept of the “authorised heritage discourse” (Smith, 2006) highlighted how a minority of heritage professionals continues to define values and meanings on behalf of much larger majorities. This aligns closely with the Faro Convention's definition of a heritage community as consisting of “people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations” (Council of Europe, 2005, Article 2b).

The Zagreb Museological School has also engaged with the broader question of whether museology should evolve into heritage studies or whether the two should coexist as complementary but distinct fields. As Peter Howard (2003) has observed, heritage can be “really anything we want” since “things actually inherited do not become heritage until they are recognized as such. Identification is all” (p. 6). Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) have gone further, suggesting that “heritage can be visualized as a duality—a resource of economic and cultural capital” or even that heritage is “a commodity, moreover one that is simultaneously multi-sold in many segmented marketplaces” (p. 22). These perspectives impose more questions than they provide answers as to what heritage might be—which is, or must be, the crucial prerequisite for defining the core business of any museum or heritage related issue. The discussions about these universal topics, and more precisely their adaptation towards a local context, is now an important part of the curriculum of the MA in Museology and Heritage Management at the University of Zagreb, much as it is in many other similar museology or heritage related university programmes around the world.

The question of paradigmatic shift: From museum studies to heritage studies?

The relationship between museology and heritage studies presents a genuine dilemma for the Zagreb School, as it does (most probably) for many comparable programmes internationally. The original definition of museology as part of information sciences, pointing toward the study of the identification, protection, and communication of material testimonies of culture and nature (i.e., museality) and aiming to protect human heritage (Maroević, 1993), remains relatively strong and very directly linked to museums as institutions mainly focusing on objects. Eco-museums and new museology challenged these ideas, opening a new chapter emphasising that the prime content of museological study cannot be an institution, nor only museum objects and collections, but the concept of heritage, which includes museum objects but does not end there.

Heritage studies in recent years have responded to this longstanding request, even when repeating some known arguments. The Zagreb School was among the prominent institutions to support this transition, initially through some of Šola's works which opened the way toward the acceptance of heritage studies ideas in Zagreb (Šola, 2003, 2005), and more recently through the integration of critical heritage studies perspectives into teaching materials and research topics. The Zagreb School's position on this question has been pragmatic rather than doctrinaire. The renaming of the university programme to include heritage management alongside museology was a signal that the two need not be seen as competitors but as complementary perspectives. Museology needs to remain in focus since heritage studies cannot cover all aspects of museum-related work, while at the same time heritage studies constitutes an attractive way to continue into the future, but only if it can exploit the knowledge already achieved by museum studies/museology (Babić & Vujić, 2012).

Global or regional? Future visions for museology education

Will the future of museology/museum studies, and related teaching about it, be a global or foremost a regional process? What are the pros and cons of each scenario? The case-study of Croatia's Zagreb Museological School could offer some ideas and dilemmas but cannot offer the ultimate answer. Still, it could contribute towards an understanding of possible future(s).

We in Zagreb have several times opened discussions as to whether we want to make our master's programme in museology and heritage management fully international, delivering it in English only, or whether it will remain as it is today, fully in the local language, Croatian. The question touches on fundamental issues of accessibility, cultural identity, and the relationship between language and heritage itself. If heritage is, as we argue, a culturally specific phenomenon whose meaning is partly constituted through linguistic practices (among others), then the language of instruction is never a merely technical or administrative matter.

The Republic of Croatia is today part of the European Union; however, some of its valuable museum/heritage objects are located in other European countries due to historical circumstances. Thus, Croatia at least could be a case study for sharing experiences of colonised heritage, since, while still in Europe, it is not the same Europe—a perception common among colonised countries. This distinctive position—European yet having experienced forms of imperial dispossession—gives the Croatian experience a particular relevance for contemporary debates about restitution, shared heritage and the decolonisation of museum practices.

The overarching challenge is that today, as far as heritage is concerned, many traditional museum/heritage related scientific disciplines (archaeology, art history, biology, ethnology, technical sciences, history) deliver increasingly practical heritage solutions alongside theoretical ones. Those who fund research, private or public, more or less directly, are signalling that they want to see tangible results. The requirements of today's society tend toward utilitarian, practical, and measurable (often only by economic standards) results in every human activity, including academic as well as museum-related work (Babić & Vujić, 2012). Accordingly, the domain of museum/heritage interpretation and management is often handled without sufficient knowledge.

Because of all the aforementioned, plus some other reasons, the Croatian middle way could serve as the model for how museology might be taught in the following years, not to say decades. Not as the only option, but as one among many, as a model that maintains theoretical rigour while responding to practical demands, that honours local heritage specificities while engaging with global debates, and that keeps museology in productive conversation with heritage studies rather than subordinating one to the other.

Conclusion

The Zagreb Museological School has traversed a remarkable intellectual and institutional journey over more than seven decades. From Antun Bauer's pioneering vision of museum objects as documents of knowledge, through Ivo Maroević's systematic elaboration of museality within information sciences, Tomislav Šola's broadening of horizons toward community engagement and heritage studies, and Žarka Vujić's applied research on Croatian museums and her foregrounding of interpretation, to the current programme's integration of heritage management, heritage literacy and critical heritage studies. The Zagreb School has demonstrated a consistent capacity for theoretical innovation grounded in a distinctive disciplinary identity.

From this current visionary perspective, heritage interpretation uses all information and knowledge acquired to empower communities. Heritage literacy embraces the idea that heritage participation is a universal right. Empowering local people to become real heritage guardians in an open and democratic process is maybe the only way to reach these goals, no matter how challenging it may sound. Museums are invited to have a vital role in this. While differences around the world regarding implementation may be significant, the main goal is, we firmly think, always mutual. We all are invited to act locally while the idea of heritage and human legacy is a global one. In diversity we are united, with a reason.

It is a challenging task but more than desirable if we want to reach, address, and accordingly transfer and exchange experiences among us all, in a democratic way and with full respect toward the mutual understanding of diverse heritages we are all concerned with. The future can be shaped but never fully anticipated, and that is precisely why it is so interesting. The same applies to museology and heritage studies: if we stay united (no matter our particular differences) we are much stronger.

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

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Abstract

The article analyses how professionalism in museum education is defined and enacted in Latvia based on the first national survey of accredited museums (2024). Although legislation frames museums as professional institutions, findings reveal a gap between normative expectations and everyday practice. Directors largely equate museum education with school-oriented activities yet prioritise soft skills and digital competence over pedagogical or content expertise when assessing educators. Fragmented employment structures, limited training opportunities and high staff turnover further challenge professionalisation. The study concludes that this mismatch calls for reconsidering how museum educators' roles and qualifications are conceptualised within Latvia's evolving museum landscape.

Key words: museum education; professionalisation; museum professionalism; Latvia; community engagement

Résumé

Repenser le professionnalisme dans la formation muséale : Résultats de la première enquête nationale menée en Lettonie. Cet article analyse la définition et la mise en œuvre du professionnalisme dans la médiation culturelle en Lettonie, à partir de la première enquête nationale menée

auprès des musées accrédités (2024). Bien que la législation définisse les musées comme des institutions professionnelles, les résultats révèlent un décalage entre les attentes normatives et la pratique quotidienne. Les directeurs assimilent généralement la médiation culturelle aux activités scolaires, tout en privilégiant les compétences transversales et numériques à l’expertise pédagogique ou disciplinaire lors de l’évaluation des médiateurs culturels. La fragmentation des structures d’emploi, le nombre limité de formations et le fort taux de rotation du personnel constituent des obstacles supplémentaires à la professionnalisation. L’étude conclut que ce décalage appelle à repenser la conception des rôles et des qualifications des médiateurs culturels dans le paysage muséal letton en constante évolution.

Mots-clés : médiation culturelle muséale ; professionnalisation ; professionnalisme muséal ; Lettonie ; participation communautaire

A museum is always an interpretation of life—a selective, meaningful construction of reality that prompts the question: who is telling the story? The question that arises from this: what knowledge and skills does the person telling this story possess? To what extent do differences in individuals’ knowledge or skills shape the narrative? How do they change the story if this person is a professional museum worker or a volunteer representing community? Furthermore, does the changing role of museums in society (for example the *of/by/for all* approach or the increasing role of community engagement) create a context that influences the narrative of this story?

The 2022 International Council of Museums (ICOM) museum definition underscores both professionalism and community participation as fundamental aspects of museum practice, stating that museums “operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities” (ICOM, 2022). It leaves room for discussion about what is meant by the term “professionally” and whether it is always compatible with increasing community engagement in museum work.

A museum educator is at the forefront of a museum, helping to interpret its mission and engage with visitors, audiences and communities. The authors investigate the roles of a museum educator in telling the story of a museum. They also examine the specific skills and character traits needed for a museum educator today, revisiting the concept of a professional.

Museums in Latvia are regarded as professional institutions. By law, the state and municipal museums undergo a rigorous and recurrent accreditation process to “ensure the professionalism and quality of the museum’s core functions” (Kultūras ministrija, 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 following questions:

what do museum directors understand with *museum education* and *museum educator*, and what education, knowledge and skills do they identify as important to the work of museum educators?

The overall aim of this article is to critically assess the idea of professionalism in museum education. This article argues that in Latvia, museum educators' professionalism is shaped by a fundamental misalignment between normative frameworks and institutional practice, where soft skills and adaptability are prioritised over pedagogical and content expertise that, in turn, could marginalize or alter the museum's central narrative. This challenges conventional understandings of professionalisation as knowledge-based and calls for a reconsideration of how museum educator roles are defined.

Theoretical framework

Several significant changes in museums have occurred in recent years that also influence the role and position of museum educators, who are at the forefront of museum operations.

First is the tendency of museums to become visitor-centred institutions instead of an institution that primarily preserves cultural heritage (Murawski, 2021). Museums have shifted “from being about something to being for somebody” (Weil, 2007, p. 30), or in other words have reoriented from cultural heritage objects in museum collections to museum audiences and their experience (Coghlan, 2018).

Second, significant change is the turn towards museum communities. Community participation in general and in the museum field specifically are addressed from various angles. Some see “social participation as a synonym for good governance practice” (Cortés-Vázquez et al., 2017, p. 15) or as an integral part of heritage governance (Blake, 2015). In museology, these ideas manifest in the movements of Latin American new museology, sociomuseology and ecomuseology, arguing for the necessity of new museum forms, developed and governed by communities and with participatory engagement of communities, as announced in American scholar Nina Simon's widely read work *Participatory Museum* (2010). Involvement of a community is strengthened by the new definition of museums and the broad museum community debates occurring prior to the adoption of the definition (ICOM, 2022).

Third, a tendency that influences museum development is the controversially perceived concept of professionalism in museums. When the term *professionalism* was explicitly included in the official definition of a museum (ICOM, 2022), it sparked debates. As noted by ICOM members during the consultation process for a new museum definition, such a turn could 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, [professionalism] excludes all voluntary workers. ... It would cut them off from most funding and public support” (ICOM Define Analysis Group, 2021, p. 53).

Museum educators are in the spotlight as persons who are in direct contact with museum visitors and communities and who have “the power to enact this greater purpose of museums' service to and with communities” (Wood, 2023a, p. 4) and who play a fundamental role in carrying out the public-facing elements of a museums mission.

Inevitably they face conflicting demands and expectations serving as a bridge between the museum, its collections, and the needs, interests and experiences of the visitor (Wood, 2023a)—far beyond the simpler task of just crafting programs suitable to particular audiences—rather providing linkages between a museum’s resources and a community’s needs (Munley & Roberts, 2006).

As if the ambitious pressure on museum educators to serve as gatekeepers in museums was not enough, there is also ongoing discussion about professionalism that involves “placing oneself in the hands of qualified experts” and “requires practitioners to be worthy of that trust” (Evetts, 2014, p. 32). It 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 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 the “museum professions” with their “professional activity” fit into this framing, as defined by the ICOM Code of Ethics (ICOM, 2017, 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. A 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).

Museologists indicate diverse general abilities or even personality traits needed for a *brave, new* museum educator. Wood in her edited volume *A New Role for Museum Educators* indicates that “it becomes even more important to have a museum educator’s mindset—centred on the visitor and focused on relevance” (Wood, 2023a, p. 5). Parker, in turn, distinguishes between experience designers, facilitators and hosts (Parker, 2022, as cited in Rasmussen & DiCindio, 2023, p. 263) indicating that these rather broad roles sometimes cannot be implemented by one individual. Also, in relation to the idea of closer collaboration with communities, such qualities of a museum worker as social justice, empathy, collaboration, partnership and trust are mentioned (Murawski, 2021).

As a museum educator may have multiple and diverse roles depending on the museum s/he works for and necessity, Wood concludes that “museum educators are multi-faceted and visitor-focused”, while on practical level museum educators use both pedagogical knowledge (the methods and practice of teaching) and content knowledge (Wood, 2023b, p. 85).

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) 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).

Referencing the previous work of Zeller, Kletchka (2021) advises a more holistic approach instead of tertiary education-based professionalisation, recognising different cultural contexts of museums or science content knowledge (Bailey, 2006). Wood (2023a, p. 3) states that the museum educator provides to the visitors “intellectual, social, and emotional access to museum collections and experiences”. So, she points out that the museum educator needs not only understanding of a museum content and knowledge in a relevant science field but also comprehension of human behaviour and motivations to be able to understand visitors’ needs. Bailey adds to the set of skills needed organisational savvy, project management and presentation ability (Bailey, 2006).

Thus, the authors of the article conclude that museum educators need a wide variety of skills and abilities, ranging from the broadest personality traits such as being a *changemaker* (Murawski) or *bridge builder* (Wood) to specific organisational skills, pedagogical knowledge and an understanding of the museum context and scientific field.

To interpret Latvian case and survey results we shall use a holistic approach presented by Tran and King (2007), who identify three core knowledge domains for museum educators: (1) pedagogical knowledge relating to teaching and learning, (2) collection-related content knowledge, and (3) museum-specific contextual knowledge.

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.

Key concepts such as pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge and soft skills were operationalised through predefined survey categories informed by the theoretical framework. Respondents were asked to assess their importance using a Likert scale, and responses were grouped according to the three-domain model applied in the analysis. Museum directors were also asked to reflect on the general role and developments in museum education in Latvia and in their museums.

Results and discussion

Museum educators as an occupation

Museum educators are employed in museum teams in different positions. In Latvia, job titles are shaped according to occupational classification codes, which are associated with differences in average salaries for public institutions. The official statistics of the State Revenue Service provide data on two professions that are directly related to museum education work: museum educator and educational and visitor services manager (in the museum sector). Statistical data show that for the last five years the number of people performing these duties in museums has increased significantly: from 141 people in 2020

to 182 persons in 2025. This increase confirms the growing importance of museum education in museums, as also pointed out by museum directors in a survey. This growing trend possibly reflects 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).

However, only the largest museums in Latvia have a team of museum educators. Most museums have only one or two such specialists. According to survey data, 42% of museums have only one museum educator and another 16% of museums have two museum educators. About one fourth of museum educators (24%) perform museum education work but their main job responsibilities are not related to it. Only 2% of museums report they do not have such specialists at all. Small museums are forced to operate with staff who combine a wide variety of job responsibilities. Other data also characterize the variability and uncertainty of museum educators’ professional activities. Only two thirds (62%) of all museum educators are employed full-time. Museums in Latvia experience frequent staff changes, as 33% of employees have less than three years of experience in museums. Eighty-eight percent of those working in museum education are women—a sharp gender imbalance that may be further explained by close to minimum wages.

Museum educators in Latvia are characterized by a wide diversity in age, years of experience in museums, and educational backgrounds. Approximately half of all museum educators, or 52%, have higher education related to teaching and 60% have prior experience in education.

Overall, although the role of museum education in Latvian museums is growing, employment is fragmented and characterized by insecurity and frequent changes, as well as an inability to focus professionally on museum education work, as it must be combined with other job responsibilities.

These conditions challenge conventional models of professionalisation as stable, knowledge-based occupations (Evetts, 2014), instead pointing towards a more precarious and hybrid professional status.

Understanding museum education in Latvia

In Latvia, museums undergo a rigorous and recurrent accreditation process to “ensure the professionalism and quality of the museum’s core functions” (Kultūras ministrija, 2010). Museums are regulated by the Museum Law (Saeima, 2005 with significant amendments to the law in 2025), which outlines three main functions of the museum. The third function, in addition to preserving and researching the museum collection, is to educate the public through exhibitions, displays, educational programmes and other forms of communication related to the museum’s activities. Thus, museum education is primarily referred to as educational programmes.

This normative understanding prevailed among museum representatives (directors) when asked about their initial associations with museum education. They primarily associate museum education with educational activities in museums (indicated by 28% of respondents); educational work with schoolchildren and children (16%) and interactive classes (11%). The museum educator as an educational worker is also mentioned relatively often (10%). Some associations emphasize the promotion of historical understanding (6%), the opportunity to learn outside of school (5%), the communication dimension and audience expansion (4%), as well as creativity (4%).



Figure 1: The summer session of Nedarbnīca, an informal initiative by Latvian museum educators, took place in August 2023 at the History and Art Museum of Olaine (Latvia), where participants tested the educational program “Journey Through Time: 1919,” a reenactment through role-playing of a historical battle. Photo by Intars Šupiņš, with permission of the Promotional Society of Museology in the Baltics.

These results show that the perception of museum education in the view of museum professionals is closely linked to educational activities for students—especially classes that are positioned as a continuation of the learning process outside the school environment. The semantic field of associations is dominated by pedagogical and educational aspects, complemented by interactivity, creativity and diversity as characteristics of the methods. It is important to note that respondents mention not only content and methods but also museum educators themselves as a professional group, thus confirming that the field is also perceived in a personalised way.

To understand trends in museum education, the survey asked two complementary questions about the most significant developments in museum education during 2021–2024. The responses provide an opportunity to map both macro-level processes (policy initiatives, national programmes, common professional discussions) and micro-level experiences (creative initiatives of specific museums, project implementation, changes in working methods).

The most frequently mentioned significant event in the field of museum education at the national level was participation in the cultural education programme Latvian School Bag (a state-funded national programme that provides two cultural experiences per year for every school-age child in Latvia introduced in 2018) (indicated by 24% of respondents). The second most common trend is expansion of museum education programmes (24%) and digitisation trends (22%), which are largely related to the impact of COVID-19 and remote communication. Less frequently, respondents mentioned professional development opportunities for museum educators (7%), the creation of offerings tailored to different

audiences (6%) and the promotion of museum accessibility (6%). Even less frequently, aspects such as promoting audience participation, linking programmes to school curricula, recognizing museum education as an important part of museum activities and using modern methods were mentioned, as well as exchanging professional experience and the availability of funding.



Figure 2: Participants of the Baltic Museology School 2025 test accessibility solutions for visitors with visual impairments at the Baltic Sea Animal Rehabilitation Centre, part of the Lithuanian Sea Museum. Photo by Jana Šakare, with permission of the Promotional Society of Museology in the Baltics.

Museum directors' views on the development of museum education suggest a rather normative and pragmatic understanding of the field, primarily as educational and learning activities. This understanding does not connect to the new roles of museums in society and the view of museum educators as professionals who interpret the museum mission for visitors or engage with communities. However, some responses highlight the broader social significance of museum education, emphasising strengthening national identity and fostering historical awareness.

Overall, the results suggest a strong emphasis on pedagogical knowledge in defining museum education, with content knowledge remaining backgrounded and soft skills recognised mainly through practical attributes such as interactivity and creativity, rather than as a distinct domain of professional competence.



Figure 3: Another participant in the “Journey Through Time: 1919,” role-playing reenactment at the History and Art Museum of Olaine (Latvia). Photo by Intars Šupiņš, with permission of the Promotional Society of Museology in the Baltics.

Skills and knowledge of museum educators

Professional background or qualifications of museum educators are not regulated by a normative requirement in Latvia. There are also no education programmes specifically for museum educators. There is a cultural heritage module included in the history and archaeology studies bachelor’s programme at the University of Latvia. Since 2020, there has been a master’s programme in cultural heritage governance and communication 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 organised by several leading museum associations.

The quality and sustainability of museum education is largely determined by the professional skills and accumulated experience of those who carry it out. Therefore, the survey included a question that allows for the assessment of the importance of various skills and competencies in the work of museum educators.

As previously mentioned, authors group skills of museum educators around three main knowledge domains: (1) pedagogical knowledge relating to teaching and learning, (2) collection-related content knowledge, and (3) museum-specific contextual knowledge (Tran & King, 2007). Based on the survey data (Table 1) museum directors rate skills to conduct educational work with children (97%), youth (97%) and adults (93%) as important (4) or very important (5). In contrast, the pedagogical domain is generally

perceived as less important to the job of a museum educator. Roughly half (52%) of museum directors rank any education in pedagogy as important or very important. Prior pedagogical experience is viewed as more valuable, with 68% 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 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 & 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

Survey conducted by the 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, as shown in Table 1, only roughly half (55%) of museum directors consider education in a field related to museum content important or very important for the job. Previous experience in museum education is seen as more valuable, with 66% considering it important or very important.

The third domain—museum-specific 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 the Latvian speaking population, with English and Russian language skills considered important or very important by 46% and 26% of museum directors, respectively. The survey highlights ongoing digital transformation context, with 86% 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 number one digital innovation implemented during the period of the 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%), communication and interpersonal skills (97%) and planning and organisational skills (96%) 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 professionalisation of museum education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that professionalism in Latvian museum education is characterised by a misalignment between existing normative frameworks, formal expectations and on-the-ground realities. This prioritisation of soft skills over pedagogical and content knowledge complicates the three-domain model proposed by Tran and King (2007) and contradicts the overall museum directors' views that pedagogical knowledge matters in defining museum education.

In Latvia, the normative framework requires museum directors to ensure professionalism and quality in museums' core functions. However, the strong emphasis placed on soft skills in hiring museum educators, the absence of specific educational requirements and low salaries raise questions about whether the existing framework adequately reflects current professional realities. While museum educators are expected to engage and educate diverse audiences, that is strongly linked to pedagogical goals and pedagogical and subject-specific knowledge, which are typically acquired through higher education, professional training, or prior experience that is considered less important by approximately half of museum directors. Instead, soft skills and digital competence are prioritised, although these alone are insufficient to define professional museum education practice. Museums that prioritise heritage preservation and scholarly authority tend to emphasise content expertise, whereas visitor-centred and community-oriented institutions place greater value on relational and communicative skills.

In Latvia, legislation largely reflects a professionalised model, while many practices increasingly prioritise soft skills. This tension ultimately concerns who interprets the museum narrative and on what basis. If museum educators are responsible for mediating institutional knowledge and engaging communities, then expertise in the museum's subject area should remain central, alongside pedagogical and interpersonal competencies. An alternative approach would be to view museum educators not as reinforcing professional hierarchies, but as community-oriented cultural actors aligned with contemporary participatory museum models. However, without clear professional standards and structured training pathways, the situation risks reinforcing ambiguity rather than strengthening the professional status of museum educators.

More broadly, this study contributes to international debates on museum professionalism by demonstrating that professionalism in museum education is not fixed or universally defined, but shaped by national and/or institutional priorities, financial possibilities and changing expectations. The Latvian case highlights a wider tension within the museum sector between professionalism grounded in specialised expertise and more flexible models centred on participation, communication and community engagement.

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Le professeur Ogou a soumis le bref rapport suivant sur l'évolution du programme de formation muséale de cette importante initiative béninoise.

Professor Ogou has submitted the following brief report on developments in the museum training programme of this important Beninese initiative.

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

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Résumé

La formation des professionnels des musées constitue un enjeu stratégique pour la sauvegarde et la valorisation du patrimoine en Afrique. Depuis sa création en 1998, l'École du Patrimoine Africain (EPA), basée à Porto-Novo, joue un rôle central dans ce domaine. Issue du programme PREMA de l'ICCROM, l'EPA est devenue une organisation internationale à vocation panafricaine, active dans les quatre aires linguistiques du continent. Elle articule son action autour de quatre mandats : la formation, l'éducation au patrimoine, l'expertise, et l'édition spécialisée. L'offre de formation de l'EPA comprend un cursus diplômant (licence professionnelle), des formations continues et des modules sur mesure. Sa pédagogie repose sur l'articulation entre théorie et pratique, adaptée aux contextes spécifiques africains. Plus de 2000 professionnels ont été formés depuis sa création. Face à l'augmentation des effectifs et à l'évolution des métiers du patrimoine, l'EPA projette la construction d'un campus moderne, l'ouverture de masters spécialisés, la création de nouvelles filières de licence professionnelle, et l'équipement en laboratoires de pointe. En tant qu'acteur institutionnel de référence, l'EPA s'impose aujourd'hui comme un levier de professionnalisation, d'intégration régionale et d'innovation dans le secteur muséal africain.

Mots-clés : formation muséale ; École du Patrimoine Africain ; EPA ; professionnalisation du patrimoine ; coopération panafricaine ; gestion du patrimoine culturel

Abstract

Training museum professionals in Africa: The role of the African Heritage School and future perspectives. The training of museum professionals is a strategic priority for safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage in Africa. Since its establishment in 1998, the African Heritage School (EPA) in Porto-Novo, Benin, has played a central role in this field. Building on the legacy of the ICCROM PREMA programme, EPA has developed a pan-African approach to heritage education through degree programmes, continuing education, and tailored professional training. Combining theory and practice and responding to African contexts, EPA has trained more than 2,000 professionals. The paper reviews its achievements, current challenges, and future plans to expand infrastructure, academic programmes, and specialised training opportunities.

Keywords: museum training; African Heritage School; EPA; heritage professionalisation; Pan-African cooperation; cultural heritage management

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 : le 14 mai 2009, le Bénin lui confère le statut d'organisation internationale, et le statut d'organisation panafricaine à vocation régionale lui est attribué par l'Union africaine le 31 janvier 2015. 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, archives et 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 2 000 professionnels 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 quatre à huit 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, matériels 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.

Museology education and training in India: Challenges, adaptations and context-responsive models

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Abstract

This paper examines the historical evolution, institutional development and contemporary challenges of museology in India. Despite early academic institutionalisation and international recognition, the discipline remains constrained by fragmented curricula, limited training infrastructure, uneven professional standards and misalignment between education and museum practice. Drawing on institutional case studies, particularly from the Indian Institute of Heritage, this essay highlights adaptive and sustainable models including contextualised curricula, field-based learning, internships, community-curated initiatives and audience-centred outreach such as the Discovery Box. It argues that a decolonised, practice-driven and community-rooted framework is essential for strengthening museology's social relevance and long-term sustainability in India.

Keywords: museology in India; decolonising; museum training; community engagement; sustainability

Resumen

Museología en la India: Desafíos, adaptaciones y modelos sostenibles. Este artículo examina la evolución histórica, el desarrollo institucional y los desafíos contemporáneos de la museología en la India. A pesar de su temprana institucionalización académica y reconocimiento internacional, la disciplina sigue enfrentando limitaciones derivadas de planes de estudio fragmentados, una infraestructura de formación insuficiente, estándares profesionales desiguales y una falta de articulación entre la educación y la práctica museística. A partir de estudios de caso institucionales, especialmente del Instituto Indio de Patrimonio (Indian Institute of Heritage), el ensayo destaca modelos adaptativos y sostenibles que incluyen currículos contextualizados, aprendizaje basado en el trabajo de campo, prácticas profesionales, iniciativas de curaduría comunitaria y programas de extensión centrados en los públicos, como la Discovery Box. Se sostiene que un enfoque descolonizado, orientado a la práctica

y arraigado en las comunidades es esencial para fortalecer la relevancia social y la sostenibilidad a largo plazo de la museología en la India.

Palabras clave: museología en la India; descolonización; formación museística; participación comunitaria; sostenibilidad

Despite a rich heritage and a network of around 1,200 museums (Seth & Sadiya, 2023), museology education and professional training are often described as relatively limited in institutional presence and public visibility. The field faces multiple challenges, including the continued reliance on inherited Eurocentric museological frameworks, limited training institutions, inadequate engagement with diverse communities, particularly marginalised groups, and a persistent gap between academic training and museum practice.

Situated within the broader development of museology in India, this paper specifically examines the evolution of museology education and training, tracing its institutional development, curricular formation, and emerging practice-oriented and community-responsive pedagogical models. In doing so, the paper draws upon historical scholarship, institutional developments, and selected pedagogical and outreach initiatives, including illustrative examples from the Indian Institute of Heritage (IIH), to analyse how museology education is responding to changing museum realities and community expectations.

I argue that the sustainability and relevance of museology education in India depend upon stronger collaboration between museums and academic institutions, greater integration of practice-based learning, and curricula grounded in local cultural contexts and lived museum realities. I further suggest that museology education in India increasingly requires context-sensitive and decolonisation-oriented approaches that move beyond inherited theory-heavy models toward more community-rooted and socially engaged forms of training and practice. In this context, decolonisation is understood not merely as curricular diversification, but as the restructuring of museology education through locally grounded knowledge systems, community participation, and socially responsive pedagogical practice.

While the development of museology education in India remains shaped by structural, pedagogical and professional constraints, there is also growing interest in the discipline, reflected in increasing student enrolment, curricular experimentation, and innovative outreach initiatives. These developments indicate ongoing attempts to bridge long-standing gaps between theory and practice, academic institutions and museums, and museums and their communities.

Historical development of museology education in India

The theoretical foundations of museology in India were shaped by early Czech museologists and were subsequently expanded and contextualised by key Indian scholars including V. H. Bedekar, V. L. Devkar, N.R. Banerjee, M. L. Nigam, and others. Indian museological scholarship has long engaged with questions concerning the nature of museology, museum education, professional training, and the relationship between museums and society. Scholars such as Bedekar and Banerjee contributed significantly to establishing museology as a distinct field of knowledge within the Indian context, while also expanding discussions beyond

museums as collecting institutions toward their educational and social functions. Similarly, Devkar emphasised the importance of professional museum training and the development of systematic museology education in India. Scholars such as M. L. Nigam, V. S. Agrawala, S. M. Nair, A. Bose, and Iftikar Alam further contributed to discussions on professional training, museum education, public engagement, and the contextualisation of museological practice within Indian cultural realities. Collectively, these scholars helped shape critical discussions on museum education, professionalisation, cultural contextualisation, and the adaptation of museological theory to Indian institutional and social realities.

One significant line of inquiry emerging within Indian museological thought concerns whether museology predates the museum as an institution. This question is central to the writings of V. H. Bedekar, who argued that while museums are key sites of museological practice, museology itself encompasses a broader inquiry into humanity's relationship with heritage, community and the environment (Bedekar, 1987).

Anupama Bhatnagar (1999) echoes this perspective by tracing the origins of museological thinking to early practices of collecting and preserving socially significant natural and cultural objects that existed prior to the emergence of modern museums. According to Bhatnagar, these practices formed the conceptual foundation of museology, which later assumed its institutional form within museums. She further emphasises that museology operates at multiple levels—from theoretical reflection to applied techniques—and extends beyond museums to encompass broader heritage practices concerned with the preservation of cultural and natural legacies (Bhatnagar, 1999, 29)

India's engagement with international museological discourse can be traced to the formative years of ICOFOM, during which Indian scholars actively participated in early annual meetings and theoretical debates. As noted by Brulon Soares (2019), India was among the few countries whose representatives contributed perspectives grounded in local practices and diverse regional contexts, thereby shaping early discussions on museology. An early example of such engagement can be seen in Bedekar's contribution to the *ICOFOM Study Series* where he addressed methodological questions and argued for a broader, human-centred understanding of museology (Bedekar, 1987). His intervention is significant for introducing perspectives from an Indian context into early ICOFOM debates and for emphasising the importance of context-sensitive museological theory beyond Eurocentric frameworks.

As highlighted by Anita Shah (2019, p. 166), Bedekar viewed museology as an “instrumental discipline” that addresses professional challenges and informs museum practice through innovative concepts, skills and techniques. In this sense, museology contributes directly to museum practice by informing teaching and training processes and by translating theoretical insights into applied methodologies. Based on over three decades of teaching and research experience, Bedekar articulated three patterns through which museology relates to museum practice in India. First, museology may follow initiatives undertaken by museums to address professional problems creatively. Second, museology may generate concepts, methods and techniques that museums may not immediately adopt, often due to institutional inertia or because such ideas are ahead of their time. Third, museology contributes to improving museum efficiency and effectiveness when research and teaching in formal museology centres are transmitted to students and practitioners who apply these insights in professional contexts (Bedekar, 1987). Bedekar also cautioned against attributing the limited impact of museology solely to theoretical shortcomings, instead emphasising structural constraints and communication gaps within museum institutions as significant limiting factors.

While foundational European and Indian museological scholarship established museology as a distinct and socially engaged field of knowledge, comparatively limited attention was given to how these theoretical ideas would be translated into curricula, pedagogical frameworks and professional training structures in India.

Although India's first museum was established in 1814, museology emerged as a formal academic discipline only in the mid-twentieth century. The need for trained museum professionals was recognised as early as the 1907 All India Museum Conference, yet meaningful institutional responses remained absent for several decades (Banerjee, 1990). Early discussions focused narrowly on technical roles such as taxidermy, while broader questions of curatorial training, disciplinary knowledge and museum management were only gradually acknowledged, notably during the 1912 conference.

The urgency for structured museological education was reiterated in the Markham and Hargreaves Report of 1936, which explicitly recommended formal training for museum personnel. Despite this recognition, no systematic training framework was implemented during the colonial period. N. R. Banerjee later critically observed that although the colonial administration was fully aware of the need for formal training of museum professionals, no concrete measures were taken to address this gap. He argues that the responsibility for the failure to implement the recommendations of the Markham and Hargreaves Report rests squarely with the colonial authorities (Banerjee, 1990). Even the comprehensive recommendations of the All India Museum Conference in 1937, which included initial training, refresher courses, inter-museum visits and overseas study, remained largely unrealised (Banerjee, 1990). As Bedekar later noted, despite the existence of a Museums Association in the United Kingdom, India lacked any formal museum training programmes prior to independence, and museum personnel were often trained through arrangements with the UK Museums Association rather than within indigenous institutional frameworks (Bedekar, 1988). This historical reliance on imported frameworks later shaped the structure and content of museology curricula in India, contributing to the long-term dominance of Eurocentric models of museum training and interpretation.

The institutionalisation of museology began only after independence, marking a significant shift in both academic intent and disciplinary positioning. India is often credited with taking a global lead in establishing university-level museology programmes as a distinct academic field (Banerjee, 1990). A major turning point occurred in 1952 with the establishment of the first formal academic programme in museology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, where a dedicated department of museology and a postgraduate course were introduced.¹ This initiative marked a decisive step toward the decolonisation and academicisation of museology by situating professional training within Indian universities (Shah, 2019). It also represented a broader shift away from colonial administrative training structures toward institutionally grounded academic museology in India.

¹ The museology programme at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda began as a postgraduate diploma course and was later developed into an MA in museology.

Over the following decades, postgraduate programmes were introduced at several institutions,² including the University of Calcutta, Banaras Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University, the Birla Institute of Technology and Science and the National Museum Institute (now the Indian Institute of Heritage). Subsequently, additional institutions began offering master's degrees, diplomas and combined programmes that integrated museology with related fields such as conservation, archaeology and heritage studies. While these developments indicate institutional expansion, they also reveal uneven geographical distribution and the absence of systemic national consolidation.

At present, museology education in India is delivered through a limited number of university-based departments offering predominantly pre-service postgraduate programmes, often with a strong emphasis on practical training conducted in collaboration with nearby museums. In addition, a smaller group of institutions offer one-year postgraduate diplomas or combined programmes in museology and conservation or archaeology; however, these are generally narrower in scope and oriented toward specific technical competencies rather than broader academic engagement.

Notably, whereas early 20th-century debates on museology training in India emphasised in-service training for existing museum professionals, contemporary educational priorities have shifted towards preparing future practitioners through pre-service programmes. Opportunities for in-service training nevertheless remain limited in scale and continuity, underscoring a persistent gap between academic provision and the evolving professional development needs of museum personnel. Some institutions, including the Indian Institute of Heritage (IIH), address this gap through request-based, tailor-made capacity-building initiatives for museum professionals in India and abroad. These are typically designed to meet the specific training requirements of participating museum professionals. Nevertheless, such interventions operate within a broader landscape that lacks a coordinated national framework for continuing professional development.

Although these institutional developments reflect the growth of museology as an academic field, they also reveal continuing structural challenges. The expansion of programmes has been uneven, access remains limited and curricular frameworks have often prioritised technical and administrative competencies over critical theory, community engagement and contemporary debates such as decolonisation, accessibility and social inclusion. Consequently, many curricula continue to reflect inherited disciplinary models rather than fully engaging with the changing realities of museums in India.

Ironically, as early as the 1960s, India's leadership in university-based museology education was acknowledged internationally. In a UNESCO report, Philip Rawson remarked that "India, too, is leading the world in the university training of museology students" (Rawson, 1965, p. 19). This early recognition, however, stands in sharp contrast to contemporary concerns surrounding curricular stagnation, fragmentation and the limited integration

2 The University of Calcutta launched a postgraduate diploma in museology in 1959 and later MA/MSc programmes in 1973; Banaras Hindu University introduced a postgraduate diploma in 1968, later upgraded to an MA in 1979; Aligarh Muslim University began a postgraduate diploma in 1973, which evolved into a master's programme in 2004; and the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, introduced a postgraduate course tailored to the science stream. The National Museum Institute (now the Indian Institute of Heritage) was established in Delhi in 1989 with a postgraduate programme in museology, followed by additional programmes at institutions such as the University of Rajasthan, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, and Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kerala. Several institutions also offer one-year postgraduate diplomas and combined courses in museology and conservation.

of local knowledge systems and socially responsive museological practices. Tracing this historical trajectory provides a critical lens for examining how museology education in India has evolved, the challenges it continues to face and the extent to which it has adapted to support sustainable and context-sensitive models.

These early debates surrounding museum training, professionalisation and dependence on imported institutional models continue to shape contemporary museology education in India, particularly in ongoing tensions between international standardisation and locally grounded museological practice.

Curriculum structure and pedagogical approaches in Indian museology

Curriculum formation in Indian museology has not followed a linear trajectory of disciplinary consolidation but has instead evolved through a contested process shaped by international standardisation efforts and enduring structural constraints within India. While frameworks advanced by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) sought to define a coherent global foundation for museum training, their incorporation into Indian university structures produced uneven and often compressed curricular models. Consequently, museology programmes in India continue to grapple with the long-standing tensions between theoretical grounding and technical competence, between disciplinary specialisation and professional generalism, and between uniform standards and contextual adaptability. Many programmes continue to negotiate the tension between internationally standardised museological frameworks and the need for pedagogical models grounded in India's multilingual, culturally diverse, and community-oriented museum realities.

An examination of museology programmes across Indian universities reveals significant diversity in course content, duration and eligibility criteria, resulting in uneven academic and professional outcomes. Concerns regarding standardisation emerged early. In 1976, the Museum Association of India recommended the adoption of an agreed and uniform syllabus for museology education in the country (Banerjee, 1976). The proposed structure included core areas such as introduction to museology, museum administration and management, collection organisation and documentation, museum architecture, preservation and care of collections, exhibition and presentation, educational activities, public facilities and services, research and publications, museum libraries and photography, along with a compulsory project-based component in applied museology aligned to students' disciplinary backgrounds (such as archaeology, anthropology, zoology, or botany).

These national discussions were closely aligned with parallel international developments. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) played a central role in shaping museum training worldwide during this period. In 1967, ICOM convened a meeting in Brno, Czechoslovakia, bringing together experts from eight European countries. The objective was to coordinate training programmes, curricula and teaching methods, and to promote exchange among museum studies centres (Boylan, 1987). A key outcome of this meeting was the decision to share information on curricula through the ICOM Secretariat, with the aim of developing a common basic syllabus to serve as a foundation for museum training globally.

The ICOM Common Basic Syllabus was formally adopted at the ninth General Conference of ICOM in Paris in 1971. It identified nine essential components of museum training applicable to both university-based programmes and professional courses: introduction to museology; museum organisation, operation and management; museum architecture

and layout; collections and documentation; research; preservation and care of collections; exhibition and presentation; public facilities; and educational activities. The ICOM Training Unit further emphasised that effective museum training should ensure “sufficient instruction in the academic aspects of the subject to ensure that students with differing backgrounds of knowledge reach a common level of the subject” (ICOM Training Unit, 1972, p. 54).

Patrick J. Boylan noted that ICOM also resolved to recognise museology as a discipline in its own right while clearly distinguishing between museology and museography. The organisation stressed the need for comprehensive museological and museographical training for future museum leaders while allowing more technically focused museographical training for museum technicians (Boylan, 1987).

Despite these international frameworks, the adaptation of standardised models within India proved complex. However, the incorporation of these frameworks into Indian university structures generated significant curricular and pedagogical tensions. Earlier, museology programmes in some universities balanced ‘core subjects’ and ‘museology training’, while others focused on well-rounded museology training covering both theoretical and practical aspects. Early reviews of Indian museology programmes revealed inconsistencies in curricular design and pedagogical emphasis. Bedekar’s analysis of museum training in India highlighted limitations in existing programmes and questioned whether they adequately addressed the evolving needs of the museum profession (Bedekar, 1973–74). He expressed concern that foundational or core disciplines³ could not be effectively taught simultaneously alongside the extensive range of topics prescribed under the ICOM syllabus, particularly within the constraints of Indian university structures (Bedekar, 1973–74).

A persistent structural constraint further complicating curriculum design is the heterogeneous academic background of students. Entrants to postgraduate museology programmes often come from diverse fields—including the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities—yet have little to no foundational knowledge in museology, as it is rarely taught at the undergraduate level. This diversity necessitates curricula that simultaneously introduce foundational museological concepts while also addressing advanced professional competencies, placing additional pressure on already compressed programme structures.

These concerns were reinforced by V. L. Devkar, who underscored ICOM’s clear distinction between museology proper and core disciplinary subjects such as art history, archaeology, ethnology, history, zoology, botany and technology. According to Devkar, ICOM emphatically maintained that these core disciplines should be studied either prior to, or concurrently with, professional training in museology at the university level (Devkar, 1989). These debates reflect long-standing tensions in Indian museology education between disciplinary depth and professional breadth.

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, limited public visibility of the discipline and misalignment with contemporary museum practice.

3 Subjects such as art, history, archaeology, anthropology, history, zoology, botany, etc.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and professional training

Despite India's early leadership in university-based museology education, persistent concerns remain regarding curricular coherence, theoretical depth and responsiveness to changing museum realities. Historically, museology programmes emphasised museographical techniques and operational training, often privileging technical competencies over critical reflection, interdisciplinarity and social engagement. This legacy continues to shape curricular unevenness across institutions.

Recent decades have witnessed notable curricular expansion and diversification. Most programmes now combine foundational modules on the history, functions and social role of museums with specialised training in collection management, exhibition development, museum education, administration, architecture, conservation and marketing. Increasing attention is also being given to community-centric museology and digital museum practices. Institutions such as IIH have further incorporated skill-based components—including exhibit preparation, graphic design, carpentry, casting and moulding and diorama-making—reflecting a growing integration of academic learning and applied professional practice. Greater curricular flexibility is increasingly offered through electives, internships and dissertation work aligned with students' disciplinary backgrounds, signalling ongoing pedagogical adaptation.

Nevertheless, structural gaps remain. While academic frameworks frequently draw upon standardised international models, museum practice in India often continues to operate through situational and experience-driven approaches, producing a persistent misalignment between pedagogy and institutional realities. This continued reliance on inherited Eurocentric disciplinary frameworks is further compounded by the limited availability of Indian-authored foundational texts and regionally grounded case studies, constraining the development of curricula responsive to the diversity of museum practices and knowledge systems in India. The absence of nationally agreed-upon operational and professional standards for museums further complicates curriculum design and weakens alignment between academic training and professional expectations. Consequently, the integration of critical theory, decolonial perspectives, accessibility and locally grounded knowledge systems remains uneven across museology programmes in India. As a result, museums are often approached through universalised institutional frameworks rather than through locally situated cultural, linguistic, and community-based realities. Although interdisciplinarity is widely recognised as central to museological thinking, curricula often continue to retain inherited disciplinary structures rather than fully engaging with the complex social, cultural and ethical challenges confronting museums in India.

These curricular limitations are also reflected in broader patterns of professional training and workforce development within the museum sector. Many Indian museums, particularly government-run institutions, continue to experience significant capacity gaps within their existing workforce. A substantial proportion of museum professionals enter the field without sufficient formal academic or professional preparation in museology, which can affect the effective management of museum functions and everyday operations, interpretation practices, and public engagement initiatives. The limited integration of research-based museological approaches within everyday museum operations further reinforces the gap between academic training and institutional practice.

A related challenge lies in the continuing disconnect between academic museology and contemporary museum practice. Despite its development as a research-driven discipline, museology often continues to have limited influence on everyday institutional functioning. This disconnect stems largely from insufficient collaboration and communication between academic institutions and museum professionals, often shaped by institutional boundaries and differing professional priorities. As Bedekar (1987) observed, meaningful coordination between academia and museums results in mutual enrichment. In its absence, both domains are adversely affected—academic museology risks becoming detached from on-ground realities while museums fail to benefit from research-based insights and innovation. Although academic institutions continue to generate new approaches, pedagogical models, interpretive resources and research-based innovations, these are seldom integrated into museum practice because of institutional resistance or perceptions that such innovations are premature or impractical.

Structural and professional challenges

Museology education in India faces a persistent structural mismatch between limited training infrastructure and employment practices within the museum sector. Despite the presence of a large and expanding museum network, the scarcity of postgraduate training institutions and the absence of uniform recruitment standards have constrained professional pathways for formally trained museologists. This reflects broader gaps in the professionalisation of the field.

India has around 1,200 museums, yet only a limited number of institutions offer postgraduate or professional training relevant to curatorial roles and museum operations. As a result, despite increasing demand for skilled museum professionals, opportunities for specialised academic and professional preparation remain concentrated within a small number of universities. This limited training landscape restricts both academic positions and professional opportunities for formally trained museologists.

The challenge is compounded by the absence of standardised recruitment criteria across museum institutions. A postgraduate degree in museology is not a mandatory requirement for many museum positions; instead, candidates with degrees in allied disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology, zoology, or botany are frequently appointed to curatorial roles, which are sometimes supplemented only by a diploma in museology. Consequently, formally trained museology graduates often continue to face constrained employment prospects, highlighting a persistent disparity between professional training and employment practices within the sector. Ironically, many curatorial posts in government-run museums also remain vacant, reflecting deeper institutional and structural concerns.

Nonetheless, incremental shifts are visible. Some government museums have begun to explicitly require a postgraduate degree in museology for certain positions, indicating gradual institutional recognition of specialised professional training. While uneven and limited in scope, these developments suggest a slow movement toward stronger alignment between academic preparation and professional expectations within the museum sector.

Parallel to these developments, the professional identity of museology has also undergone gradual transformation. Historically, museology was often perceived as a secondary or fallback option by students trained in archaeology, history, fine arts or the natural sciences. However, over the past decade, the field has increasingly gained visibility as a

purposeful and viable career pathway, supported by the gradual expansion of museum and heritage institutions in India. Postgraduate programmes in museology now attract students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds who enter the field through informed academic and professional interest rather than by default.

Institutions such as the Indian Institute of Heritage (IIH) frequently receive applications far exceeding available seats, reflecting growing interest in museology education and practice-based training. This increasing demand may also be linked to institutional visibility, geographic location and the growing presence of action-research initiatives that provide exposure to innovative museum practices and practice-based learning models. However, this rising academic interest also reveals a deeper structural tension: the availability of stable and meaningful employment opportunities has not expanded at the same pace as professional preparedness and student enrolment. Although greater access to internships, research initiatives and practice-based learning has helped bridge aspects of the gap between academic study and institutional practice, stronger systemic alignment between museology education, recruitment structures, and professional opportunities remains necessary.

Public visibility, accessibility, and community engagement

In India, public awareness of museums and their contemporary social role remains uneven, and misconceptions regarding museums and museology continue to persist. Historically, museology was often not widely understood as an academic and professional field, even among educated audiences, and was at times confused with musicology, reflecting broader uncertainty regarding its scope and relevance. Museums themselves were frequently perceived primarily as repositories of objects rather than as spaces for education, dialogue, and community engagement.

Although perceptions have gradually begun to shift, many museums in India still face challenges in reaching wider and more diverse audiences. Despite increasing emphasis on community-centred approaches and in-situ preservation, museums often struggle to engage underserved and marginalised communities, particularly those who may not regularly visit museums or recognise their cultural rights to access and participate in heritage. These challenges reflect broader issues of cultural accessibility, public inclusion and audience development within the museum sector.

At the same time, growing public interest in heritage, curation, and cultural interpretation has gradually expanded public engagement with museums and museum-based learning. Museums are increasingly being recognised as spaces for learning, social interaction, and cultural participation rather than solely as institutions of preservation. Nevertheless, meaningful community engagement continues to require sustained outreach, accessible interpretation, and context-sensitive approaches capable of addressing the diverse social and cultural realities of Indian audiences.

Against these structural, pedagogical, and accessibility-related challenges, several institutions have increasingly experimented with practice-based and community-oriented models of museology education and museum engagement.

Adaptation strategies and sustainable models

As Bedekar (1987, p. 54) observes, “Museology is basically concerned with recurring museum problems, possibilities, and solutions which can be of relevance to other museums. Museology is concerned with the whole museum service.” This articulation positions museology not merely as a technical discipline but as a reflexive field that engages with the structural, interpretive and social dimensions of museum practice. It frames museology as a comprehensive service-oriented discipline that continuously negotiates between institutional realities, public expectations and evolving cultural contexts. Within this framework, training in museology must move beyond procedural knowledge to cultivate analytical and solution-oriented thinking.

In response to contemporary challenges, several adaptation strategies and practice-based models have emerged within Indian museology education. The following sections discuss selected illustrative initiatives, particularly from the Indian Institute of Heritage (IIH), where the author serves as a faculty member in the department of museology. These initiatives are examined as case-based examples that engage with broader structural and pedagogical challenges identified earlier in the article.

Many of the following pedagogical adaptations directly respond to structural concerns discussed earlier, including insufficient contextualisation, inherited Eurocentric training frameworks, uneven accessibility, and weak museum-community engagement.

Contextual and practice-based curriculum models

An effective adaptation strategy in the Indian museology context involves critically engaging with international frameworks and professional standards while ensuring their alignment with local realities, rather than their uncritical adoption. Although global models provide theoretical and methodological foundations, they often do not adequately address India’s diverse heritage landscapes, community-based practices, varied collections, and complex socio-cultural realities. Such approaches therefore emphasise contextual and community-responsive museology education rather than the direct replication of universalised museum models. To bridge this gap, museology curricula and professional training increasingly incorporate Indian case studies and regional examples reflecting the local and regional orientations of museums, their audience engagement practices, and institutional constraints. Such contextualisation also requires attention to governance structures, funding mechanisms, and operational challenges shaping museum practice in India.

Several museology programmes are gradually integrating such approaches to provide students with learning experiences that are both practically oriented and regionally grounded. In one institutional example at IIH, local case studies are embedded across all areas of museology training and supported through sustained interaction with experienced museum professionals. Students are actively involved in the design and implementation of educational programmes, exhibitions, and academic projects as part of their practical training, which constitutes a substantial component of the coursework. This contextualised approach enables students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world contexts while developing competencies that are globally informed yet locally responsive. Course assignments further reinforce this orientation by encouraging students to critically engage with museums and collections within their own regional contexts.

Field-based learning and internships further strengthen the relationship between academic study and professional practice. Visits to museums and heritage sites expose students to operational practices, institutional challenges, and the diversity of approaches within the Indian museum landscape. Through field assignments and project-based engagement, students examine museum operations, collections management, visitor engagement and curatorial practices within real institutional settings.

Internships similarly provide hands-on professional experience in areas such as curation, exhibitions, documentation, research, and outreach. Certain museology programmes, including selected initiatives at IIH, also provide stipends during internships. These are often funded by the university or partner museums. Such arrangements enable students to gain professional exposure while simultaneously supporting museums that operate with limited staff and resources. In turn, they foster collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships between academic institutions and museums.

Another important aspect of adaptation involves linguistic accessibility. The use of bilingual or multilingual teaching practices helps bridge communication gaps, improve comprehension and broaden participation among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In one illustrative institutional example, bilingual instruction in English and Hindi has been used to support accessibility while preparing students for professional engagement within multilingual museum environments.

Curriculum adaptation also requires balancing museology training with disciplinary specialisation. In many universities, substantial time is allocated to core disciplines alongside museology, which can restrict comprehensive engagement with museological subjects. A more balanced framework positions core disciplines as foundational introductory courses while integrating disciplinary perspectives through applied museological teaching. Technical areas such as collections management, curatorship, documentation and exhibition design can then be taught through case studies drawn from diverse collections and museum types. This method helps students understand how museological principles operate across varied knowledge domains and institutional settings.

This approach aligns with Bedekar's (1987) observation that while the theoretical foundations of museology remain broadly consistent across museums, specialised institutions require supplementary contextual understanding to address their particular operational needs. In India's contemporary museum landscape, characterised by museums with increasingly diverse and unconventional themes, an exclusively discipline-specific model has become less practical. Instead, greater emphasis is now placed on methodological adaptability and the application of museological principles across varied collection contexts.

Experiential and inclusive pedagogical models

Museology education increasingly seeks to address institutional and societal challenges through participatory and experiential pedagogical models. Through action research projects and field-based engagements, students are encouraged to identify issues relating to accessibility, outreach, audience development, and institutional sustainability while developing practical responses suited to diverse geographical and socio-cultural settings. In this process, they critically examine museum operations, identify gaps in access and engagement, and participate in activities such as exhibition curation, publication development and educational programming. Such approaches strengthen the relationship between theoretical inquiry and applied institutional practice.

One illustrative example of this practice-based pedagogical approach is the *Mini Museum – A Discovery Box* initiative, conceptualised and developed by the author in the context of museology teaching and outreach initiatives at IIH. The project demonstrates how experimental pedagogical models can respond to issues of accessibility, outreach, and experiential learning within Indian museology education.

Conceived as a portable and replicable outreach framework, the Discovery Box translates core museological principles into applied community-oriented practice. Structured as an experiential learning laboratory, it enables students to engage with collecting, documentation, handling, preventive conservation, exhibition design, museum education, and audience engagement, while simultaneously reflecting on the theoretical foundations of the discipline.

The Discovery Box is designed as a thematically curated educational kit containing replicas of museum objects representing diverse domains, including natural history, archaeology, ethnography, paintings, decorative arts and textiles, among others. Organised in an age-appropriate and tactile format, it incorporates replicas, visual aids, interpretive labels, guided questions and activity-based prompts to encourage active engagement. Its structure also encourages students to reflect critically on curatorial selection, interpretive framing, representational ethics and audience accessibility while designing programmes tailored to specific community contexts.

Implemented within outreach initiatives for underserved and first-time museum audiences, the Discovery Box functions as a pre-museum engagement tool, introducing the idea of museums through touch-based and story-driven interaction. Audience research conducted during programme planning informs the design of activities, ensuring responsiveness to learners' expectations and prior exposure. Through this process, students receive practical



Figure 1. Mini Museum – a Discovery Box. Photograph © Juhi Sadiya.

training in audience-centred programme development and evaluation, while communities engage with heritage in accessible and meaningful ways.

The Discovery Box framework has been further customised into multiple thematic models developed around different museum collections, audience groups, and regional contexts. This flexibility enables students to design context-responsive programmes suited to diverse geographical, cultural, and educational settings. The model further addresses barriers to museum access by offering a low-cost and complementary educational resource to conventional museum visits.

Students are also trained to conceptually integrate collections from select Indian museums in order to design new “mini museum” models communicating heritage and identity within coherent interpretive frameworks. Such integrative exercises strengthen understanding of museums as interconnected knowledge systems rather than isolated institutional



Figure 2. Participants interacting with Discovery Box objects as part of an experiential museology exercise. Photograph © Juhi Sadiya.

categories. Designing such models for underserved and non-museum-going audiences also encourages critical reflection on inclusion, representation, and outreach, reinforcing the relationship between museological theory and socially responsive practice.

Audience-centred outreach forms another important dimension of these pedagogical approaches. Students are encouraged to research the needs of diverse publics, including school children, persons with disabilities, rural communities, patients, and socially marginalised groups, and to develop educational initiatives extending beyond conventional museum spaces. These initiatives are tested through direct engagement with real audiences, enabling students to refine their approaches based on feedback and observed impact. Selected outreach initiatives such as Gandhi for All,⁴ Museum Goes to Hospital,⁵ outreach to madrasas and school engagement projects illustrate how academic training can translate into socially embedded museum interventions. By extending programming to schools, hospitals, madrasas and community settings, such initiatives position museology as a catalyst for inclusive cultural participation. They also reinforce the understanding of museums as socially responsive institutions requiring adaptability, participation, and sustained public engagement.



Figure 3. Students with visual impairments engaging in inclusive object-based learning during the Gandhi for All outreach programme. Photograph © Juhi Sadiya

4 The Gandhi for All workshop series is an outreach initiative conceived and designed by the department of museology and implemented across 15 regions of India for diverse audiences, including children, differently abled individuals, economically disadvantaged and marginalised communities, paediatric patients, and students from monasteries, madrasas, and rural schools. Using replicas of personal belongings of Mahatma Gandhi sourced from the National Gandhi Museum and presented in a specially designed trunk, the programme facilitates engagement with his life, principles and legacy.

5 Museum Goes to Hospital is a museum outreach initiative developed in collaboration with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences to explore the therapeutic use of museum resources for paediatric cancer patients. It began with an exhibition displayed in the institute's paediatric ward of facsimiles from the painting collections of the National Museum, National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, and National Gallery of Modern Art, and includes regular workshops aimed at supporting children's mental well-being through engagement with museum objects.

Educational resource development similarly forms an important component of experiential learning. Within coursework relating to museum education and visitor studies, students are trained in the development of educational booklets and interpretive materials grounded in object-based pedagogy and designed to connect museum collections with classroom learning. This process cultivates skills in research, interpretive writing, content development and visual communication, while simultaneously strengthening educational outreach initiatives. Resources such as *Gandhi for All* booklet,⁶ *Through the Museum Lens Teacher's Handbook*,⁷ and *Museum Safari*⁸ demonstrate how structured educational materials can foster object-based and participatory learning among school audiences and support broader dissemination of museum knowledge.

Taken together, these pedagogical approaches position museology training as a site of experimentation responding to challenges such as uneven accessibility, limited audience engagement, and institutional resource constraints. The emphasis on portability, replicability and adaptability ensures that the models developed are not confined to a single institutional setting but can be implemented across diverse institutional and community contexts. Through iterative testing, community engagement and reflective practice, students learn to develop interventions that are both theoretically informed and practically viable.

Community-oriented and collaborative museology

Community-centred museology is gaining increasing relevance within the Indian context as museums seek to become more participatory and reflective of local voices. Heritage-rooted and community-curated approaches contribute to the decolonisation of museum narratives by challenging historically dominant Eurocentric interpretive frameworks and recognising the authority of communities over their own cultural heritage. Such approaches are particularly significant in regions where traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices remain embedded within everyday life.

Selected initiatives associated with the Department of Museology at IIH have contributed to the development of community museums in different regions of India. These projects involve training local stakeholders in the management, care and interpretation of collections, enabling communities to participate directly in museum-making processes. Community members contribute lived experiences and culturally grounded knowledge, enriching interpretation and strengthening local ownership.

These collaborative models encourage long-term sustainability while fostering context-sensitive and socially relevant museum practices. They also demonstrate the potential of community-curated museology to promote cultural stewardship and broader public participation in heritage processes.

Collaboration between museums and academic institutions similarly plays an important role in strengthening museological practice. Various institutional partnerships have contributed to exhibitions, community museums, educational resources, outreach

6 An activity-based graphic booklet interpreting Gandhi's life and values through replicas of objects from the National Gandhi Museum, available in English, Hindi, four regional languages and Braille.

7 Through the Museum Lens Teacher's Handbook focusing on the ancient civilizations of India, centred around the Indus Valley Civilization collection of the National Museum, New Delhi.

8 Museum Safari, an interactive booklet exploring environmental conservation, featuring the natural history collection of the State Museum, Lucknow.

workshops, capacity-building programmes, and publication initiatives. Examples include teacher and student handbooks based on museum collections, outreach models such as the custom-designed *Gandhi Trunk*⁹, and exhibitions including *Re(ad)dress: Return of Treasures*, organised during India's G20 Presidency and the 46th World Heritage Committee Meeting.

Projects such as *Yuva Sathi*,¹⁰ *Museum Goes to Hospital*, and the *Gandhi for All* workshop series further illustrate how research-led academic engagement can translate into meaningful museum interventions. Although such collaborations remain limited in scale, they highlight the potential of sustained institutional partnerships in connecting museological research with applied museum practice.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate how museology education in India is increasingly moving toward adaptive, community-oriented, and practice-based models that seek to address structural limitations while expanding the social role of museums.

Conclusion

Museology in India reflects a trajectory shaped by early theoretical engagement, institutional experimentation, and persistent institutional and pedagogical constraints. Despite its early academic institutionalisation and international recognition, the discipline continues to face fragmented curricular structures, limited institutional representation and misalignment between academic preparation and professional practice. Yet this conjuncture is not solely marked by limitation. Museology in India stands at a critical and generative juncture, defined as much by structural challenges as by emerging possibilities for renewal.

As this paper has argued, the development of museology education in India has been shaped by inherited Eurocentric frameworks, fragmented institutional development, and persistent disconnection between academic training and museum practice. At the same time, processes of adaptation are increasingly visible. The growing emphasis on contextualised curricula, field-based immersion, internships, audience-centred outreach, and community-curated initiatives reflects a gradual shift from technically confined instruction toward a more reflexive and socially embedded practice. Museological knowledge is increasingly produced through engagement with diverse publics and regionally grounded cultural contexts.

The historical trajectory of museology education in India further demonstrates how international standardisation models were often adopted without sufficient adaptation to local cultural realities, multilingual contexts, and community-based knowledge systems. The curricular gaps, professional challenges, and accessibility concerns discussed throughout this article reflect the continuing influence of these inherited structures.

9 *Gandhi for All Trunk*, a custom-designed educational resource containing replica objects and interpretive materials from the National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi, each symbolising Mahatma Gandhi's life and principles, used as part of the museum outreach initiative.

10 A Volunteer Guide Programme conceptualised and designed by the department of Museology, IIH for training youth volunteers in taking guided visits of the school groups and family groups at the National Museum.

Within this context, a more decolonised and context-responsive museology education involves moving beyond exclusively object-centred and institutionally confined models toward pedagogies grounded in participation, community collaboration, regional case studies, multilingual accessibility, and practice-based engagement. The examples discussed in this article, including community-oriented outreach, contextualised curricula, and experiential learning initiatives, illustrate emerging attempts to reposition museums as socially embedded and culturally responsive institutions.

The sustainable consolidation of the discipline requires stronger collaboration between universities and museums, context-sensitive curricula, professional capacity-building, and alignment between training and recruitment. Without such structural coherence, the gap between theory and practice will persist.

The future of museology in India lies in embracing its role as a context-responsive discipline that integrates theoretical inquiry with applied experimentation, and global discourse with local knowledge systems. Reimagined as community-rooted, reflexive, and socially inclusive, museology education in India has the potential not only to adapt international paradigms but also to contribute meaningfully to global debates on decolonisation, plurality, accessibility, and the democratisation of museum knowledge.

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

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Abstract

This article examines the gap between contemporary museological theory and museum training programs in Mexico. Through qualitative analysis of curricula and graduate testimonials, the author evaluates whether programs incorporate the socially engaged principles of the 1970 Santiago Roundtable and the interdisciplinary, systems-thinking approach of the Ulm School. While Mexican institutions like ENCRyM excel in technical conservation and exhibition production, findings reveal an excessively technical and inward-looking focus that neglects community engagement, participatory methodologies, and decolonial practices. Graduates emerge as critical technicians—aware of museums' social function but lacking tools for collaborative implementation. The article advocates for curricular reform integrating participatory design, audience studies, and applied research to align Mexican museology with global movements toward community-centered, transformative museum practice.

Keywords: museology in Mexico; museum training; community engagement; participatory museology; curriculum reform

Resumen

La reverberación del museo: ¿Qué falta en los programas de formación museística en México? En este artículo se aborda la brecha entre la teoría museológica contemporánea y los programas de formación museística en México. A partir de un análisis cualitativo de los planes de estudio y los testimonios de los egresados, el autor evalúa si los programas incorporan los principios de compromiso social de la Mesa Redonda de Santiago de 1970 y el enfoque interdisciplinario y sistémico de la Escuela de Ulm. Si bien instituciones mexicanas como la ENCRyM destacan en la conservación técnica y la producción de exposiciones, los hallazgos revelan un enfoque excesivamente técnico e introspectivo que descuida la participación comunitaria, las metodologías participativas y las prácticas decoloniales. Los egresados emergen como técnicos críticos, conscientes de la función

social de los museos, pero carentes de herramientas para la implementación colaborativa. El artículo aboga por una reforma curricular que integre el diseño participativo, los estudios de públicos y la investigación aplicada para alinear la museología mexicana con los movimientos globales hacia una práctica museística transformadora y centrada en las comunidades.

Palabras clave: museología en México; formación museística; participación comunitaria; museología participativa; reforma curricular

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 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 include: 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 a political institutions whose social function oscillates between preservation, democratization, and decolonial inclusion—urging a critical, context-sensitive reevaluation of their cultural agency?

These questions are not unique to Mexico. They resonate with a broader international discussion regarding the future of museum professionalization. The 2025 ICOFOM, ICTOP, and COMCOL symposium, *Imagining the Next Generation of Museum Professionals: Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers*, explicitly questioned whether contemporary museum studies programs are adequately preparing professionals for rapidly changing museums and communities and whether current educational models successfully connect theory with practice. The Mexican case therefore provides a valuable lens through which to examine tensions that are increasingly evident across museum education globally.

The Ulm model

On the other hand, and a couple of years before the Santiago Round Table, is the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm 1953–1968), which 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 must address ecological and social imbalances, critiquing unchecked consumerism and planned obsolescence decades before these topics entered mainstream discourse, and address that for Ulmer sustainability should not be just considered in ecological terms but stressing 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.” 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 INAH 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 on 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 (2017). 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's in museology and specialty in museography, alongside international courses organized through collaborations with UNESCO and the Organization of American States (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” (2017, pp. 20-21). This shift was exacerbated by the institutional separation between ENCRyM and ENAH, which limited interdisciplinary exchange and community-oriented approaches (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 engages 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 method 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, digital mediation, balance between theoretical frameworks and applied skills, and alignment with global shifts in museology. The full results of this review, including the analysis broken down by program, are presented in the Appendix. The most relevant findings for the arguments of the article are summarized below.

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? And 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.

The limitations on this approach 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.

Educational programs: Strengths and structural gaps

According to this study, 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. Outside the capital, there is only one National Museum Training and Updating Program offered by Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, in 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 when 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; 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 near absence of digital mediation within most Mexican programs is particularly significant given recent international calls for museum professionals to develop digital leadership capacities rather than merely technical competencies. Pearlman (2025) argues that museums increasingly require professionals capable of navigating interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical technological innovation, and networked learning environments. These capacities were largely absent from the programs reviewed in this study.

Similar tensions have been identified elsewhere. A national survey of museum education in Latvia (Vikmane et al., 2025) found ongoing debates regarding what constitutes museum professionalism, highlighting tensions between disciplinary expertise, pedagogical competencies, community engagement, and the practical skills expected of museum educators. Rather than viewing professionalization solely as technical specialization, the study argues for a broader conception that incorporates contextual and community-based knowledge.

In addition to that, according to literature reviewed, it can be stated that museum training in Mexico, particularly at the ENCRyM, is characterized by an excessively technical and inward-looking approach. This approach highlights the loss of the original anthropological framework and the institutional separation between the ENCRyM and the ENAH, which has limited the development of community-based approaches. Furthermore, contemporary curricula emphasize practical skills at the expense of a broader understanding of the museum's social role (Vázquez Olvera, 2017; Witker Barra, 2015).

These findings contrast with emerging international discussions on museum education. Bounia (2025), for example, argues that contemporary museum training must move beyond technical proficiency to incorporate digital literacy, audience engagement, accessibility, ethical decision-making, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional change management. From this perspective, the predominance of object-centered and conservation-oriented training identified in Mexican programs appears increasingly disconnected from the competencies required by contemporary museums.

Graduate perspectives: from technical competence to social practice

The testimonies of graduates confirm this diagnosis when they are asked about the skills acquired during their training. Responses such as “*Attention to detail regarding deliverables*”; “*Theoretical knowledge*”; “*The different stages of work involved in mounting an exhibition*”; and “*Continuous documented research*” reveal a focus on the operational and technical competencies of museum practice.¹¹

This focus on technical execution contrasts with the ideal of the integrated museum (Pérez Castellanos, 2022) proposed at the Santiago Roundtable, which called for professionals capable of connecting heritage with community needs. It also differs from the Ulm model, which sought to train coordinators of complex systems rather than specialists in specific tasks. According to interviewees, graduates seem more confident in the “how to do it” (installation, deliverables, documentation) than in “for whom to do it” or “with whom to do it.”

One responder reveals this disconnect when they state, “*It’s complicated because people who work in museums continue with practices that don’t connect with people and their diverse learning styles. They also aren’t up-to-date on technological issues. Although they justify this by citing a lack of resources, financial resources aren’t necessarily essential; it’s just that in many cases, there isn’t enough trained staff.*”

This type of response highlights that the problem isn’t just curricular but has become institutionalized in workplace practices. Technical training, without a counterweight in social and participatory skills, perpetuates a museum model that fails to connect with the public.

In addition to the above, the skills acquired in the ENCRyM specialty program in relation to the design of museographic projects as the central axis of student training, following the training line since the 1970s, show that graduates positively value their ability to deliver quality projects, but at the same time recognize that this same training did not provide them with tools to address the human and social dimension of the museum.

Critical analyses of museum education often present the technical and social approaches as opposing poles, as if the preeminence of one necessarily implies the absence of the other. However, the testimonies of ENCRyM graduates introduce a fundamental nuance: the technical and the critical are not mutually exclusive in their perception of their training. In fact, several responses reveal that the school has successfully instilled a strong ethical and reflective dimension, although this is not always accompanied by the methodological tools necessary to fully realize it or by opportunities for placement in real-world professional settings where students can apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom.

This tension between critical awareness and the capacity for action is eloquently manifested in two legacies that graduates acknowledge having received. On the one hand, there is the legacy of systems thinking, which the Ulm School model proposed as a paradigm for design. While specialized literature presents this approach as an aspiration for contemporary museography, one graduate asserts that it is already present in the training at the ENCRyM, although applied predominantly to the heritage object: “*The ENCRyM doesn’t teach how to conserve objects in a fragmented way. It teaches how to understand the historical, cultural, social, environmental, and symbolic context of heritage. This is systems thinking: considering the object as part of a complex system.*” This response is

11 All survey responses translated from Spanish by the author.

revealing: the graduate values training in complex thinking but applies it to the object and its multidimensional context, not necessarily to the museum's relationship with the community. It is systems thinking centered on heritage, not on the social ecosystem that surrounds it.

On the other hand, there is the legacy of critical questioning, directly linked to the spirit of the Santiago Roundtable. For example, another testimonial highlights the questioning skills fostered by the school, which transcend mere technical execution: *“The ENCRyM doesn’t teach you to mount exhibitions solely for aesthetic reasons or to fulfill an institutional narrative, but rather to question the values of each exhibition; that is, every exhibition project must consider: Whom does this exhibition represent?”* This question—“Whom does this exhibition represent?”—is profoundly political and resonates directly with the concerns of the Santiago Roundtable and subsequent currents of critical museology in Latin America. Students graduate knowing that they must question representation, that they must ask about the subjects excluded or rendered invisible in museum discourse.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that the training at the ENCRyM has successfully transmitted two fundamental legacies: complex thinking, inherited from the Ulm model, applied to understanding heritage in its multidimensional context; and critical questioning, inherited from the Santiago Roundtable's comprehensive museum approach, which challenges future professionals regarding representation, power, and the ethics of their work. However, a gap exists between this critical awareness and transformative action, a gap that the curriculum fails to bridge. Graduates know what questions to ask, but they don't always know how to construct answers with the community. The program has produced what we might call critical technicians: professionals competent in execution and aware of the political dimension of their work but lacking the methodological tools to translate that awareness into participatory and collaborative practices. The remaining challenge, then, is not only to maintain the power of these two legacies, but to integrate them into a praxis that allows us to move from ethical questioning to transformative action, from thinking about the object to dialogue with the community.

In Mexico, the educational programs of museums have remained anchored in a logic of technical expertise that, by prioritizing conservation and installation over other dimensions, ends up excluding communities from the process of meaning-making. When graduates were asked what they would have liked to learn during their time in museum professionalization programs, their responses pointed directly to the social and communicative dimensions absent from their training.

For example, one of the responses mentioned the need to acquire *“skills for a narrative discourse that truly connects with people.”* This type of demand reveals something profound: the aspiration to move from a model of unidirectional transmission—where the expert communicates pre-established knowledge from a position of authority—to a model of connection or bidirectional communication—where the museum establishes a meaningful dialogue with its audiences, where discourses are not imposed but negotiated. The word “connect” here implies dialogue, that is, an openness to the other that the technical curriculum, focused on the object and procedures, does not foster.

Another graduate, for his part, echoed this sentiment, pointing to the need for training in *“audience studies,”* adding that this topic was addressed *“very superficially.”* This perception aligns with the curriculum analysis, which reveals a lack of systematic

training in audience research methodologies, experience evaluation, and participatory design. According to the students' perception, audiences are seen as abstract recipients of information rather than concrete interlocutors with specific needs, motivations, and knowledge that must be understood and integrated into museum design.

Even the demands for technical training become relevant. For example, one interviewee mentioned in his responses the need to deepen his knowledge of "*materials and finishes ... included in an on-site practical workshop*" but immediately added, "*the primary needs of the people who will be in charge.*" The technical demands are not presented as an end in themselves, but are explicitly linked to people, to the teams that future professionals will lead, and, implicitly but crucially, to the needs of those who will use the spaces they design. Graduates not only want to know how furniture behaves, but also how to lead teams and, above all, how to consider people's needs in the design process.

Furthermore, the definitions of museums provided by graduates not only demonstrate the scope and limitations of their training but also acquire particular significance when contrasted with the new museum definition adopted by ICOM in 2022. For them, a museum is "*a space for the conservation and dissemination of cultural and historical information,*" "*a meeting point of stories by and for humanity,*" "*a public institution that safeguards and researches heritage,*" or simply "*dissemination, analysis, and conservation.*" These definitions remain within the first two dimensions of Pérez Castellanos' model (access and production), understanding production as an exercise led by experts, not as co-creation with communities.

In contrast, the new museum definition refers to communities as active agents when it states that museums "operate and communicate with the participation of communities." This formulation implies a fundamental shift from a vertical model, where the museum *speaks to* the community, to a horizontal and dialogical model, where the museum *acts with* the community. However, none of the responses explicitly mentions co-creation with historically invisible or marginalized communities, the representation of local narratives, or the transfer of decision-making power (Brulon Soares & Bonilla-Merchav, 2025). To them, the community consistently appears as the recipient of dissemination, as a service receiver, not as an active subject within the museum process.

Only a couple of responses hint at a more relational dimension. One response defines a museum as "*a space where one can observe and admire diverse objects, as well as learn about different cultures. It should be a place where narratives exist that foster a connection with visitors.*" Another one mentions the function of "*disseminating history, memory, and cultural heritage to build/reinforce an identity that strengthens social cohesion.*" These definitions incorporate concepts such as *connection* and *social cohesion*, approaching the ideal of a museum that requires professionals in this sector to be agents of transformation. However, according to the responses, it continues to reproduce a museum model that the international community has already begun to move beyond; for them, the museum remains the agent that acts *toward* the community, not *with* the community. From this perspective, the directionality has not been reversed; power has not been redistributed.

Therefore, it can be inferred that while museum education in Mexico at institutions like the ENCRyM has succeeded in fostering an awareness among its students of the museum's social function: for them, the museum should disseminate, educate, and foster cohesion. However, this awareness has not been accompanied by the methodological tools

to operationalize this function in a participatory manner. Mexican students know that the museum should connect with people, but they have not learned how to do so in concrete contexts, with specific communities, negotiating power and meanings. Professional development programs have produced professionals aware of the social dimension of their profession but lacking the tools to translate that awareness into collaborative practices. The challenge, therefore, involves not only maintaining the social sensitivity they clearly possess, but also integrating into the curriculum the methodologies, techniques and, above all, the provisions that allow a shift from a museum *for* the community to a museum *with* the community.

Professionalization, authority, and community participation

At the same time, while global debates on museum professionalization recognize that there is no single model for museum training and that each national context negotiates these tensions in its own way, they also emphasize the need for museums to operate with the active participation of communities. Based on the evidence reviewed, however, Mexican museum training programs have yet to fully cultivate this capacity, largely due to persistent issues of authority and power that museums remain reluctant to relinquish. This situation raises a series of fundamental questions: “Whose museum is it?”, “For whom do we [museums] work?”, and, perhaps most importantly, “Who speaks, and from where?” These questions further complicate the landscape of museum professional training in Mexico.

Adding to this complexity, the structural differences between curatorial and museographic processes in art museums and those in archaeology, history, and ethnography museums are rarely addressed in international debates on museum professionalization. In art museums, the process typically begins with a curatorial concept or narrative previously defined by a curator; objects are then selected and arranged to construct the exhibition narrative, functioning primarily as illustrations or materializations of the curatorial discourse. By contrast, in Mexican archaeology, history, and ethnography museums (such as those administered by INAH), the process operates in reverse: it begins with heritage objects—often the result of field research—and the curatorial narrative is subsequently developed from those objects, providing them with interpretive meaning.

Whereas the former approach illustrates through objects, the latter constructs through objects. This distinction is not merely technical; it has profound implications for the professional training of museum staff and for the ways museums establish dialogue with their audiences.

The art museum model, centered on the curator as the intellectual author of the exhibition narrative, tends to privilege historical and aesthetic research skills. However, it can also create a distance between museums and their audiences when mediation is not integrated from the outset. In contrast, in archaeology and ethnography museums, those responsible for exhibition content are not generally referred to as curators but as researchers, typically affiliated with INAH’s research divisions. This distinction is not accidental: it emphasizes a form of legitimacy grounded in the scientific study of heritage objects, but it often reinforces a unidirectional relationship with communities, in which the researcher speaks from science while the public receives validated knowledge.

In both cases, neither curators nor researchers receive systematic training in participatory methodologies or community co-creation within the programs analyzed in this study. This dual legacy—the primacy of the concept in art museums and the primacy of the object in archaeology and ethnography museums—produces professionals who are highly competent within their respective traditions but equally removed from the horizontal and dialogical practices advocated both by the Santiago Roundtable and by the most recent museum definition adopted by ICOM in 2022.

While Mexican museography education developed primarily around conservation and exhibition production, other traditions such as the Zagreb Museological School progressively expanded toward heritage management, communication studies, and community engagement (Babić, 2025). This suggests that professionalization can evolve beyond object-centered expertise toward broader social and communicative roles without abandoning disciplinary rigor.

Recognizing this distinction is crucial if a single reform model is not to be indiscriminately applied to all types of museums. It is equally essential for designing training programs that, while preserving the specificities of each field, incorporate cross-cutting competencies in mediation, participation, and the decentralization of knowledge.

Conclusion: Recommendations

The findings presented here should therefore be understood not only as a critique of Mexican museum education but as part of a wider international discussion concerning the future of museum professionalization. Across diverse contexts—including the UK, Croatia, Greece, and Latvia, among others—museum educators are confronting similar questions regarding interdisciplinarity, community engagement, digital transformation, sustainability, and the relationship between theory and practice. The Mexican case contributes to this debate by revealing how technically sophisticated training may still fall short of preparing professionals for the participatory, socially engaged, and transformative roles increasingly expected of contemporary museums.

While both the reviewed literature and the collected testimonies agree on the need to reform museum education in Mexico, these calls find in the Ulm School and Santiago Roundtable a guide for a renewed approach that orients programs toward interdisciplinary collaboration, decentralization of educational offerings, and the strengthening of ties with local communities within a holistic and systemic framework. This approach aims to conceive of the museum as an agent of community transformation.

The graduates interviewed, drawing on their direct experience in the field, offer concrete and practical suggestions that can guide this curricular reform. Their proposals, rooted in the real difficulties and needs they face in their daily practice, point to specific areas where the training received has shown limitations and where substantial improvements could be made. For example, as mentioned before, one proposal expressed with particular force refers to the need to incorporate practical materials workshops with a people-centered approach.

This proposal is interesting because it validates the importance of technical skills by confirming that a deep understanding of materials and finishes constitutes the foundation of their daily work. This justifies not only maintaining but also deepening technical training within the curriculum. Furthermore, it redefines technical skills from a social

perspective by indicating that knowledge of materials is not presented as an end in itself, but as knowledge that must serve people's fundamental needs.

Another proposal, recurring in several testimonies, points to the need to develop skills for constructing people-centered narratives. However, realizing this aspiration would require incorporating training into the curriculum in at least four specific areas: narratology applied to museography, enabling an understanding of the structures and resources for exhibitions; participatory storytelling techniques, empowering future professionals to facilitate collective narrative processes; co-creation methodologies for content with communities, providing concrete tools for collaborative work; and training in visitor experience evaluation, allowing for feedback and continuous improvement of narrative proposals.

In addition to the above proposals, the need to connect training with applied research in real-world contexts was identified by suggesting “*that we make it common practice to learn about the most relevant research in all the areas taught so that it can be applied to real INAH projects.*” This type of suggestion aims to bridge two gaps simultaneously: the gap between theory and practice, and the gap between the school and institutions in the sector. What is essentially being proposed is a training model where students not only learn the knowledge generated by academic research but also put it into practice in concrete institutional projects, with real stakeholders and real constraints. This would imply generating systematic synergies between academic institutions like ENCRyM and museum institutions like INAH's or INBAL's museum network, private museums, community museums, among others that go beyond traditional professional practices, often limited to administrative or support tasks, to become truly meaningful spaces for experimentation and learning.

These practices or professional internships should not be conceived as a mere administrative formality or as an opportunity for students to perform tasks that the institution's staff do not want to or cannot do. They should be designed as carefully orchestrated transitional spaces that allow students to move from the world of academic ideas to the complex and contradictory reality of museum spaces. Well-designed internships would not only allow students to apply their acquired knowledge, but also to confront it with the limitations and possibilities of the real-world context, develop negotiation and adaptation skills, and build professional networks that facilitate their future employment. In short, the aim is to conceive of internships not as the end of the training process, but as an integral part of it, as a laboratory where theory is put to the test and where future professionals learn to navigate the tensions between the ideal museum and the real museum.

A fourth proposal, emerging from numerous testimonies, refers to the need to deepen training in audience studies and user-centered design. Graduates point to the urgent need to incorporate audience research methodologies, user-centered experience design, exhibition evaluation, and community engagement strategies into the curriculum. This demand connects directly with the production and representation dimensions of the comprehensive museum model proposed by Pérez Castellanos, as well as with the Ulm model's emphasis on design oriented toward social needs rather than profit or mere technical functionality. Ultimately, it is about training professionals capable not only of designing technically impeccable exhibitions, but of doing so from a deep understanding of those who will experience them and from a genuine willingness to incorporate their voices into the creative process.

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. Taken together these proposals outline a horizon of curricular renewal that, without abandoning the technical strengths that have characterized institutions like the ENCRyM, complements them with methodological tools for participatory work, narrative skills for connecting with audiences, applied research experiences in real-world contexts, and job placement mechanisms that facilitate the transition to the professional world. Ultimately, the goal is to train professionals capable of executing museographic projects with technical excellence that engage with communities, based on a deep understanding of their needs and aspirations, and with the flexibility and creativity necessary to adapt to a constantly evolving museum field.

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Appendix

Mexican museum training programs

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Table 1. Program characteristics

Institution	Program Name	Duration	Delivery Mode	City	Program Orientation	Curricular Content				Notes
						Community Engagement	Audience Research	Sustainability	Decolonial Methodologies	
University Centro	Design and Production of Exhibitions	100h	Presencia I	Mexico City	Technical Approach: Prioritizes the acquisition of practical, procedural, and/or operational skills for the management, conservation, installation, and design of exhibitions.			X		Diploma
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)	Museography and Restoration Assistant	1 year	Presencia I	Mexico City	Technical Approach: Prioritizes the acquisition of practical, procedural, and/or operational skills for the management, conservation, installation, and design of exhibitions.					Specialized Technical Career program offered for its highschool students
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)	Curatorship, Museography and Exhibition Management	260h (5 modules)	Presencia I	Mexico City	Mixed Approach: Seeks to balance practical training with theoretical reflection.			X		Diploma
Escuela Nacional de Conservación Restauración y Museografía "Manuel del Castillo Negrete" – INAH (ENCRyM)	Postgraduate Specialty Program in Museography	1 year (2 semesters)	Presencia I	Mexico City	Mixed Approach: Seeks to balance practical training with theoretical reflection.			X		
Escuela Nacional de Conservación Restauración y Museografía "Manuel del Castillo Negrete" – INAH (ENCRyM)	Master's Program in Museum Studies	2 years (4 semesters)	Presencia I	Mexico City	Theoretical Approach: Focuses on conceptual discussion, critical analysis, and the historical and social foundations of museology.	X	X			
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura	National Museum Training and Updating Program	25h	Virtual	Regional circuits across the country	Technical Approach: Prioritizes the acquisition of practical, procedural, and/or operational skills for the management, conservation, installation, and design of exhibitions.					

Table 2. Program analyses

Program	Strengths	Gaps	Trends	Alignment with Ulm School Approach (Key Indicators)	Observations
Design and Production of Exhibitions (CENTRO)	Focuses on exhibition design and production; explicitly incorporates sustainability. Flexible diploma format.	No evident training in community participation, visitor studies, or decolonial methodologies. Short program with limited systemic depth. Although this higher education institution maintains a diverse portfolio of programs addressing digital mediation, sustainability, and inclusive storytelling, these dimensions were not evident in the program examined in this study.	Sustainability as an emerging axis; need to integrate mediation practices and user-centered design approaches.	Partial alignment: The program adopts a technological and production-oriented approach, but its diploma format and limited duration prevent the development of genuine systemic and interdisciplinary thinking. While its attention to sustainability is a positive first step, it is not situated within a broader framework of social needs.	The diploma has the potential to expand into a more comprehensive program (e.g., a postgraduate specialization) that integrates visitor studies and conceives design as a system of complex interactions.
Museography and Restoration Assistant (UNAM)	Provides foundational technical training in exhibition installation and restoration. Accessible to upper-secondary students.	Does not include content related to participation, visitor studies, sustainability, or decolonial approaches. Exclusively auxiliary and operational in scope.	Trend toward early technical specialization, but without alignment to the social demands of the contemporary museum.	Not aligned: This is a purely technical program focused on vocational skills, lacking both the methodological foundations and the social responsibilities that the Ulm School considered essential to design practice.	The program could be aligned more closely with the Ulm model by incorporating introductory modules on systems design and professional ethics, and by positioning itself as a first step toward more advanced studies.
Curatorship, Museography and Exhibition Management (UNAM)	Integrates exhibition management and curatorial practice; references to sustainability. Broader scope than purely technical programs.	Lacks training in community participation, visitor studies, and decolonial methodologies. Remains a short program centralized in Mexico City.	Hybrid curricula (curatorship + museography) that could evolve toward greater inclusion of audience engagement and participatory narratives.	Partially aligned: The focus on management and curatorship could be linked to Ulm's interdisciplinary vision if connected to fields such as sociology and communication. However, the absence of an explicit social commitment within the curriculum (beyond its title) and its short duration distance it from the Ulm model.	To move closer to the Ulm model, the program should be redesigned around an integrative project addressing a real community issue through analytical methodologies and social impact assessment, a central principle of the Ulm School.
Postgraduate Specialty Program in Museography (ENCryM)	Strong technical rigor in museographic project development.	Does not include evident community participation, visitor studies, sustainability, digital mediation, or	Tends to maintain a traditional training model; curricular reform is needed to	Aligned, but only in the technical dimension of design: The program applies a systemic approach but focuses	It is necessary to expand the notion of "system" from the heritage object to the museum's social system (audiences, communities,

	Well-established training in conservation and exhibition installation. Promotes systemic thinking applied to museum objects, as discussed in the article.	decolonial methodologies. Produces “critical technicians” without participatory tools.	incorporate mediation, participatory design, and visitor evaluation methodologies.	exclusively on the heritage object. In doing so, it contradicts the core of the Ulm model, namely the social responsibility of design and its application to human problems.	and territory). Consequently, the incorporation of social research modules applied to museographic design could generate practices that enhance and strengthen the program. Interviewee responses, as well as discussions across a range of professional forums, underscore the need to engage students in real-world contexts through professional placements and experiential learning opportunities that allow them to put classroom-acquired knowledge into practice.
Master's Program in Museum Studies (ENCRyM)	The only program that includes community participation and visitor studies. Offers a more reflective and theoretically grounded education.	Although these topics are included (community participation, visitor studies, sustainability, or decolonial methodologies), graduate testimonies suggest they are often addressed superficially or without applied methodologies. The gap between critical awareness and practical implementation remains. Does not include evident digital mediation methodologies.	Trend toward a more comprehensive professional profile, though still limited in sustainability and decolonial methodologies. It could serve as the foundation for broader curricular reform.	The most aligned program in theory: It is the only program that approaches interdisciplinarity and social commitment. However, the Ulm model demanded not only awareness but also scientific method and rationality to transform that awareness into action.	Redesign courses on participation and audiences to include a strong applied methodological component (e.g., real intervention projects). The master's program should lead an institutional transformation aimed at moving beyond the figure of the “critical technician” toward that of the “transformative professional” who applies socially responsible design. Interviewee responses, as well as discussions across a range of professional forums, underscore the need to engage students in real-world contexts through professional placements and experiential learning opportunities that allow them to put classroom-acquired knowledge into practice.
National Museum Training and Updating Program (INBAL)	Virtual and decentralized format through regional training networks. Reaches museum professionals beyond Mexico City. Flexible structure for continuing education.	No specific content identified regarding participation, visitor studies, sustainability, digital mediation, or decolonial approaches. Functions as a professional development program rather than initial training.	Trend toward continuous and remote professionalization; could be strengthened by incorporating modules on mediation, sustainability, and community engagement.	Not aligned: Due to its nature as a continuing education program, it lacks the depth necessary to foster systems thinking or an interdisciplinary approach. Its main value lies in its capacity for decentralization.	Despite its limited duration, it could serve as an effective vehicle for disseminating Ulm's principles of sustainability and social responsibility among museum professionals nationwide by creating dedicated thematic modules on these issues.

Developing academic training curricula for post-digital museology

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Abstract

This paper examines how academic training curricula can be redesigned for post-digital museology, an era in which digital technologies are fully embedded in museum practice and everyday life. Drawing on international research, professional competency frameworks, and interviews with museum professionals in Greece, it identifies persistent gaps in digital literacy, confidence, and strategic understanding. The paper argues that museum education must move beyond technical training toward interdisciplinary, ethics-driven, and learner-centred approaches. It proposes key curricular themes, including digital literacy, data management, audience engagement, accessibility, ethical reasoning, and change management, to prepare museum professionals for contemporary institutional challenges.

Keywords: post-digital museology; museum studies curricula; digital literacy; digital ethics; museum professional training

Résumé

Développer des programmes de formation académique pour une muséologie postnumérique. Cet article examine comment les programmes de formation en muséologie peuvent être repensés à l'ère postnumérique, où les technologies numériques sont pleinement intégrées aux pratiques muséales et à la vie quotidienne. S'appuyant sur des recherches internationales, des cadres de compétences professionnelles et des entretiens menés auprès de professionnels des musées en Grèce, il met en évidence des lacunes persistantes en matière de littératie numérique, de confiance et de compréhension stratégique. L'article soutient qu'une formation muséologique adaptée doit dépasser l'apprentissage technique pour privilégier des approches interdisciplinaires, éthiques et centrées sur l'apprenant, préparant les professionnels aux défis contemporains des institutions culturelles.

Mots-clés : muséologie postnumérique ; formation muséologique ; littératie numérique ; éthique du numérique ; compétences professionnelles

The pervasive embeddedness 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 follows a general shift in the understanding of the digital in almost all disciplines, a shift whose starting point is often attributed to Nicholas Negroponte and his seminal article “Beyond digital” (1998). He refers to the normalization and integration of technology in daily life, the situation where the digital is so integrated into social and material lives that is almost invisible.¹² Similarly to all disciplines, in the case of museology the idea of the post-digital necessitates a rethinking of how museums work, and how they approach their relations to their collections, audiences and internal structures. Consequently, the post-digital compels a critical reconsideration 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 and the challenges post-digitality brings to the fore (see Barnes et al., 2018; Carvalho & Matos, 2018; Catapoti et al., 2020; Nikolaou, 2024). These needs and challenges 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; Marty & Buchanan, 2022; Royston, 2026).

This paper aims to focus on the development of academic training curricula for post-digital museology, that is, 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 decolonisation, which must be addressed in museum training programmes at all levels. In this paper, I argue that post-digital museology requires a shift from solely technical training to an integrated, ethics-driven, interdisciplinary curriculum framework.

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 should 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 programmes that align with the demands of the post-digital era.

I will first present the ongoing discussion on the need for academic training in museum studies that address issues of digitality in the post-digital world, then will discuss the pedagogical approach of post-digital learning as well as pedagogical principles and ethical requirements that need to be considered when designing curricula for the post-digital museum. In the final part, I will present some core topics that can be developed in different modular formats for use in different levels of professional museum studies programmes.

¹² About the genealogy of the term “post-digital” see Jandrić and Knox 2022, pp. 784ff, including relevant references.

Academic curricula and (post-)digital museology: Identifying the gaps

The literature on academic training in museums has highlighted significant gaps in existing training and education programmes, especially when it comes to digital skills. Already in 2012, Lorente argued that museum studies curricula have historically focused on object-centred and conservationist approaches, often neglecting the broader socio-technical dimensions of museum work. This view was further supported ten years later by Marty and Buchanan (2022), who argued that the skills that are brought to museums by technologically focused professionals are undervalued and vulnerable, as museum technology work is still considered ancillary to the core functions of museums, which are strongly connected to physical objects and collections. It is most probably because of this focus—as some of the earliest research on the relationship between museum staff and the digital by Tallon and Walker (2008) and Russo et al. (2008) pointed to—that there seems to be a persistent disconnect between emerging technological opportunities and museum staff capabilities. This skills gap has since been intensified by rapid technological change, institutional inertia, and uneven resource distribution, especially across small and medium-sized organisations.

Projects such as the One-by-One initiative in the UK and the USA (Malde et al., 2019) and the EU-funded Mu.SA: Museum Sector Alliance project (2016–2020) have identified digital transformation as a central challenge the sector is facing. These initiatives emphasized the importance of structured digital competence frameworks, cross-disciplinary learning, and the development of agile, adaptive professionals. Both projects start from a similar basis: that digital literacy needs to be understood as much more than technical proficiency. However, each of them followed a slightly different approach in what they propose.

On the one hand, Mu.SA's competency matrix outlines key areas such as digital content creation, project management, audience development, and digital strategy—skills that extend beyond technical proficiency to encompass strategic thinking and innovation (Mu.SA Project, 2019). Furthermore, Mu.SA—building on a previous EU-funded project titled eCult Skills—identified 20 transferable and 22 digital competences (see Table 1) considered necessary for museum sector staff and connected them to new museum professional roles and specialisations. More specifically, the project outlined four emerging job profiles in the museum sector: Digital Strategy Manager; Digital Collections Curator; Digital Interactive Experience Developer; and Online Community Manager. To deliver training towards these profiles, it developed a MOOC available to museum personnel of all specialisations (Silvaggi and Pesce, 2017).

Table 1. Competences as developed by Mu.SA project

Transferable Competences	Digital Competences
Active listening skills	Application design
Analyse and synthesize information	Business change management
Communication skills	Business plan development
Creative thinking skills	Copyright and licences
Decision-making	Developing digital content
Fact driven	Documentation production
Influence/persuasion skills	Forecast development
Integrity/ethical	Information and knowledge management
Interpersonal skills	Innovating
Leadership and change facilitator	IS and business management alignment
Management skills	Managing digital identity
Mediation skills	Needs identification
Mentoring/coaching skills	Netiquette
Negotiation skills	Problem management
Networking skills	Process improvement
Resilience	Product service planning
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	Protecting personal data and privacy
Storytelling	Purchasing
Teamworking	Risk management
Time management	Solution deployment
	Solving technical problems
	User support

See <http://www.project-musa.eu/results/oers/>

One-by-One, on the other hand, followed a person-centred (as opposed to technology-centred), values-led and context-based approach (Parry et al., 2026). The project team defines digital skills as the combination of digital competency, digital capability and digital literacy, each of them corresponding to “doing, achieving and considering” (pp. 9-11). Emotional intelligence complements the frame. Digital confidence is identified as a key parameter involving cultivating the organisational, collection-based and interface-driven skills necessary to avoid a technology-driven landscape. The aspects they identify as needing attention are a shifting mindset and culture that will embrace the digital in a deeper and more meaningful sense; an emphasis on digital literacy for museum professionals that will allow them to manage, curate and interact with digital content; moving toward a more contextual and nuanced strategy per institution that will be specific

and appropriate; a systematic approach towards using AI, 3D scanning, drones, social media and other technological developments to enhance accessibility and personalised experiences for visitors; and, finally, embracing technological challenges and navigating complexities such as displays of sensitive materials or repatriation of digital replicas.

From an education providers' perspective, the research by Porter and Cunningham (2022) with museum studies faculty is very enlightening: Faculty members identified technology as one of the topics that have been introduced to museum training curricula, especially after the pandemic; however, the researchers highlight that it "will likely become even more of a core aspect of preparing for the museum education work in the future" (p. 132). In other words, it is recognized that digitality has still not been integrated to the extent that it could and should be introduced, even though its importance is being acknowledged, at least at an academic level.

Joyce Ray (2026) discussed the knowledge and skills required for digital curation, describing the approach undertaken by John Hopkins University in the USA. Framing museums as data and information centres and highlighting the importance of collaboration among other types of collecting institutions such as libraries and archives, Ray argues that digital curation education comprises multiple skills and competencies, including theoretical perspectives, knowledge of institutional practices and legal and ethical concerns and a good understanding of core conservation principles, along with management and digital skills.

The DigMus Mapping Report (Charapan et al., 2020) explored the needs for digital skills for museum professionals in the Nordic and Baltic countries to provide training in different topics based on identified needs. As per the research, three main topics were identified as central requirements: ICT literacy and digital maturity, digital communication and analysis, and (digital) data practices in museums. These findings seem to correspond to those that the research by Catapoti et al. (2020) has provided. Based on a study of museum and heritage professionals' curricula in Greece and Cyprus, Catapoti et al. argue that a shift is required in the education provided for museum and heritage professionals from focusing on technical skills to focusing on digital competency, digital literacy and digital capability. In other words, instead of focusing on tools, emphasis should be placed on the condition of the digital and what this means for museum and heritage organisations.

Nikolaou (2024), after having carefully reviewed eight case studies based on data-gathering from professionals and museums in different parts of the world (Europe, USA, other), categorized the technical and organisational challenges institutions face when it comes to digital transformation. In the former are included infrastructure, maintenance, costs, and rapid developments that quickly lead to obsolescence whatever digital is included; in the latter the most important parameters seem to be a lack of long-term vision, different levels of digital literacy among professionals, and limited budgets or possibilities to bring into organisations new staff who could handle digital projects. Especially when it comes to the digital literacy of staff, most of the case studies reviewed seem to highlight the gap between institutional needs and expectations and knowledge of museum personnel either to respond to those needs and expectations or even to guide technology experts towards providing solutions and answering those in their way.

What all these studies collectively show is that there is a gap in the training of museum personnel that does not allow them to adopt a proactive engagement with technology that would support its integration in heritage institutions.

All the above points are reiterated in discussions and interviews conducted with museum professionals in Greece in 2025. There have been five group discussions with museum professionals working for the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and three in-depth interviews with department directors.¹³ The aim of these discussions was to better understand and document the gaps in digital confidence among museum professionals holding different roles in national institutions. Apart from the organisational and technical aspects that were raised during these discussions, such as lack of long-term planning, digital infrastructure, maintenance and high costs involved in operating digital media, staff digital literacy appears to be a central concern for museum management and professionals alike. Museum professionals find that their on-the-job training has not been sufficient and the digital solutions used in their institutions even for core activities, such as documentation, are either “too complicated” or “inadequate”; they argue that they lack the digital literacy skills that would allow them to work and perform their duties better and more efficiently. Very often this lack leads to resistance to change and opening up to new audiences, with concerns such as that “putting knowledge about our collections online will make our museum susceptible to threats” (interview 1 and argument presented in all group discussions), or misunderstandings about what can be achieved through digital media regarding long-term collection management issues (interview 2).¹⁴ In other cases, museum professionals feel reluctant to engage with different media, as they believe that these will soon change and therefore there is no reason in engaging with them (interviews 1 and 3; all group discussions). Although early career professionals feel more confident in their relation to the digital world than more mature colleagues, their digital literacy and capability seem quite similar. In one of the group discussions, it was also evident that younger professionals, with an active presence on social media, were even more reluctant to introduce digital media for museum interpretation and to increase accessibility of collections as “these will need maintenance and constant change and we will not be able to support them in the long term.” “Please, give us more analogue solutions to work with”¹⁵ was their plea when discussing the design of a new exhibition.

Furthermore, the rapid introduction of AI in museums has increased museum personnel’s anxiety and insecurity (Thiel & Bernhardt, 2024). A recent online discussion organized by the John Hopkins University Museums and Heritage Studies programme brought together experts working on artificial intelligence and museums. Nick Honeysett, one of the speakers, shared outcomes from a survey suggesting that there are individuals both inside and outside museums that are sceptical about the use of AI and others that are highly supportive of it (Udani 2026), and this creates a type of internal rupture in organisations that need to work collectively to achieve common goals. AI brings museums (along with the whole world) to confront new challenges and new opportunities; however, biased outcomes and lack of context awareness are among the most common risks, while reluctance to engage with AI often connects to a lack of understanding of how and why AI can be used.

Based on the above, a series of issues can be identified: museum and heritage training curricula need to take into serious consideration the rapidly changing environment that museums operate in and provide training that will allow current and future museum professionals to develop digital confidence (see also Parry et al., 2026) along with the

13 All participants asked to remain anonymous.

14 For example, a few museum professionals seemed to believe that there are digital tools that can resolve long-term problems, such as how we measure large and heavy artworks, or how to document and measure objects that are already in showcases and difficult to handle.

15 Group discussion February 2025.

ability to understand and navigate through the complexities that AI and other technical developments bring to the fore, while also supporting the overall transformation of the sector to become more agile and relevant to contemporary audiences.

In other words, 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 and through it.

In the next section we will focus on the pedagogical principles and overarching philosophy about learning that also affects curricula design in the post-digital world.

Post-digital learning, ethics and museum pedagogies

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.

Post-digital learning is an educational approach that considers digital technology as pervasive, fully integrated and deeply embedded in everyday life. Therefore, it calls for moving away from binary debates and focus instead on learning as a critical human-centred yet hybrid experience that aims to address issues of inequality, surveillance and contextual flexibility (see also Jandrić & Hayes, 2020; Bissel et al., 2025). “The postdigital is hard to define; messy; unpredictable; digital and analog; technological and non-technological; biological and informational. The postdigital is both a rupture in our existing theories and their continuation,” as Jandrić et al. put it (2018, p. 893). In other words, post-digital theory introduces a new way of understanding learning as more than acquisition of skills, more than just a form of instrumentalisation of technology.

Post-digital learning prioritises a series of notions and ideas that are central in this discussion: It challenges the assumption that more technology leads to better learning and treats technology as a given and not as something new or revolutionary; at the same time, it supports hybrid learning spaces, sustainable practices of combining digital tools with traditional ones, and calls for contextual flexibility and critical perspective. Furthermore, post-digital learning encourages moving towards collective—as opposed to individual—human intelligence that goes beyond individual-benefit education to collaborative and networked learning. It involves questioning the datafication of education as well as data-driven methodologies, and it urges a critical assessment of the impact of technology on social justice and inequality. Furthermore, post-digital learning views education as an interaction between human and algorithmic agents and not just as the use of tools. As a context-aware pedagogy it recognizes that learning is shaped by complex and often chaotic combinations of social, material and digital activities. Finally, post-digital learning focuses on how to reconfigure and not just adopt digital technology, whereas it encourages a community of learning, sharing non-linear nurturing experiences.¹⁶

16 For a detailed presentation of these see Jandrić and Hayes, 2020; Bissel et al., 2025.

Ethics is a foundational pedagogical pillar underlying the post-digital learning approach. Ethics does not refer only to the protection of individuals and collections; most importantly, it refers to how we live, work and learn when technology is inseparable from humanity. A number of core ethical shifts are incorporated in this approach: a focus on the relational aspects of humans, non-humans and more-than-humans coming together; agency over decisions and accountability; equity and access against hidden biases and stereotypes; and an ethics of care, such as community values over individualistic, measurable and cost-driven approaches to learning and life in general.¹⁷

Bringing these approaches and post-digital learning theory to the design of museum professional training curricula, we can argue that the pedagogies used need to take into consideration three main principles: ethical and critical digital literacy, interdisciplinarity, and experiential learning models.

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. Therefore, digital engagement strategies cannot but be confronted with numerous ethical concerns: They must confront issues of representation, ownership, and participation, particularly when dealing with colonial histories, contested artifacts, 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 of any level¹⁸ that puts ethics at its core can help shift institutional cultures toward justice, openness and accountability.

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 and 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 (e.g., natural language processing) with ethical analysis (e.g., bias in algorithms or misrepresentation of marginalised communities and people in museum narratives, or the impact of AI and other digital developments on the planet and its resources).

¹⁷ About ethics and post-digital learning design see also Romero-Hall et al., 2026.

¹⁸ Training programmes may be academic and/or vocational, or executive training programmes; they can also be bespoke programmes created by or for specific museums.

Furthermore, 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 in-depth learning—may involve hands-on digital labs, project-based learning and critical simulations of ethical dilemmas in digitalisation, 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 within a post-digital learning framework.

Topics and themes for museum studies curricula

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, as discussed above. Although projects such as Mu.SA (2019) argued for the introduction of new professional profiles and possible combinations of specific competences towards these profiles, it is not just professionals holding specific roles who should be digitally literate and digitally confident but all museum staff of all levels. Otherwise, the imbalance described by Marty and Buchanan (2022) between the technologically-minded and -tasked staff and the leadership of museums will be just repeating itself.

Therefore, several different topics and themes emerge as essential for contemporary museum work across departments and job profiles. I argue that including the themes and topics presented in Table 2, and discussed briefly below, within museum studies academic curricula will enhance the ability of all museum professionals to work in the post-digital museum. These could be used in different combinations to formulate modules, or as themes within other training curricula that will support professionals in different levels of their careers and within different settings, always taking into consideration context and needs.

Table 2: Themes and topics for museum studies curricula

Digital literacy and technological proficiency
Data management and digital preservation
Digital audience engagement and digital storytelling
Inclusive and accessible design
Ethical and legal literacy
Change management and strategic thinking in a digital world

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 topic more closely, we can argue that this includes familiarity with content management systems (CMS), digital asset management (DAM) platforms, metadata standards, digitisation tools and digitalisation practices. 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. A balanced approach between technological awareness and critical thinking around digitality is of central importance.

Data management and digital preservation

Digital curation involves not just creating digital surrogates of physical objects or simply saving digital files, but also 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 digitisation as a technological tool rather than a method of thinking—or collapsing the notions of digitisation and digitalisation—has led to serious difficulties in very practical aspects of museum work, like documentation of their collections.

Digital 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 personalisation 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, multiple perspectives, and so much more (Thiel & Bernhardt, 2024). 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 just technologically proficient.

Inclusive and accessible design

Prioritising inclusive design in both physical and digital interfaces is central in post-digital museology thinking. This includes applying Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and designing for neurodiverse and physically impaired users (Fisseler, 2024). Accessibility is more than a legal requirement, it is a democratic imperative that involves not just co-creation with communities and audiences but also 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 in the digital realm.

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 artifacts 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 programmes 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.

The above topics and themes form a multidimensional profile that is essential for post-digital museum work, regardless of job title and position within the organisation. They illustrate that the future of museum professionalism lies at the intersection of technology, ethics, design and community engagement.

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, it calls for a comprehensive shift in museum professionals' training from training in technical matters towards integrative, ethically grounded, and context-sensitive learning. In other words, it calls for a post-digital learning paradigm. 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, following an open-ended, agile, creative and nonlinear understanding of knowledge making.

It is not about hiring specific staff profiles or increasing the number of digitally competent staff; it is a matter of making everyone aware of the shift in museums from being collections-focused institutions into information-based institutions, as well as of having the need to reach out to wider audiences. Digital technology champions who can argue for the value of digital skills are important (Marty & Buchanan, 2022). It is essential that leadership, but also all museum staff, realize that we are in a post-digital era that has changed and continues to change, among others, the museum world.

Therefore, effective training curricula need to be grounded in interdisciplinary content, driven by learner-centred pedagogies 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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Cultivating museum professionals: Rethinking talent development through teaching practice

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Abstract

Using action research methodology, the study analyzes an undergraduate course grounded in double-loop learning and scaffolding theory, in which generative artificial intelligence (generative AI) was introduced as a learning partner rather than a substitute for curatorial expertise. Centered on the theme of local food and cultural memory, students engaged in staged activities combining AI-supported exploration, collaborative writing, and scenario-based reflection. Findings suggest that this approach supported students' understanding of curatorial logic, narrative coherence, and the situated nature of museum work, while fostering critical engagement with AI-generated content. The study offers a context-specific example while pointing to broader questions about whether museum education is keeping pace with the technological environments its graduates will enter.

Keywords: museum education, curatorial practice, action research, double-loop learning, scaffolding, generative AI

Resumé

Former les professionnels des musées : Repenser le développement des talents par les pratiques pédagogiques. Dans l'enseignement universitaire lié aux musées, les étudiants éprouvent souvent des difficultés à relier les connaissances théoriques à la pratique curatoriale, particulièrement dans les programmes interdisciplinaires taiwanais. Cette étude examine comment une conception pédagogique intentionnelle peut contribuer à combler cet écart grâce à une approche orientée vers la pratique. À partir d'une méthodologie de recherche-action, l'étude analyse un cours fondé sur le double-loop learning et la théorie de l'échafaudage, dans lequel l'intelligence artificielle générative (l'IA générative) agissait comme partenaire d'apprentissage plutôt que comme substitut à l'expertise curatoriale. À travers des activités portant sur l'alimentation locale et la mémoire culturelle, les étudiants ont participé à une exploration assistée par l'IA, à une rédaction collaborative et à une réflexion fondée sur des scénarios. Les résultats suggèrent que cette approche a renforcé la compréhension de

la logique curatoriale, de la cohérence narrative et de l'évaluation critique des contenus générés par l'IA.

Mots-clés : éducation muséale, pratique curatoriale, recherche-action, apprentissage en double boucle, étayage, IA générative

The professional demands of contemporary museums have evolved rapidly in recent years, moving beyond collection, research, and display to encompass curatorial management, cultural and technological co-creation, digital archiving and licensing, and audience engagement with a strong emphasis on equity and social responsibility. In many countries, these shifts have prompted a rethinking of higher education frameworks related to museum studies and cultural institutions, as universities seek to respond to the new competencies required in professional practice. According to data from Taiwan's Ministry of Education, approximately 38 departments across public and private universities offer programs related to museum studies, cultural studies, arts research, cultural and creative industries, arts administration, and cultural heritage management.¹⁹ The resulting landscape is highly interdisciplinary and allows students to encounter museum-related issues from multiple disciplinary angles, yet it also disperses museum-focused learning across different curricula, making it difficult to trace a clearly articulated pathway for professional formation.

A closer examination of program and degree structures reveals that Taiwan does not yet have an undergraduate curriculum dedicated solely to museum studies. At the bachelor's level, students typically access museum-related content through a small number of elective courses and must actively choose whether to pursue this area of study. Degree programs explicitly labelled as museum studies are concentrated within a limited number of graduate institutes: three directly confer degrees in museum studies while another three focus on museum administration or arts administration and are frequently integrated with fields such as arts management, cultural policy, or creative industries. This academic environment offers breadth and flexibility, but it often lacks professional focus and depth so that graduates entering museums or cultural institutions require substantial time for readjustment and further on-the-job learning in order to acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by professional practice.

Against this backdrop, there remains a significant gap between education and work in Taiwan's museum professional landscape, particularly when viewed in relation to international scholarship on museum professional training and museum studies curricula. Much of this literature is grounded in Euro-American contexts with long-standing museum studies programs where internships, work-based learning, and professional accreditation play a central role in connecting theory and practice. By contrast, especially east Asian, Taiwanese contexts are still underrepresented in these debates, and there has been relatively little discussion of how pedagogical models might respond simultaneously to digital transformation, generational change, and local institutional conditions. This raises a critical question: when museums themselves function as learning spaces outside conventional educational systems, to what extent can standardized, classroom-based training within higher education adequately prepare future museum professionals?

¹⁹ National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Ministry of Education. (2025, July 28). College and University Information Disclosure Platform and List Information Website. College and University Information Disclosure Platform. <https://udb.moe.edu.tw/ulist/ISCED>

The author has worked as a museum professional in a national museum for nearly a decade, particularly in cross-sector collaborations between museums and young audiences, and later transitioned to academia, teaching courses in museum studies and arts administration. This movement between institutional practice and higher education has brought into focus three key discrepancies between educational provision and the realities of museum work. First, younger audiences are steadily declining, and their attention to exhibitions is increasingly shaped by trends and immediacy rather than sustained engagement with specific issues. Second, digital and virtual environments occupy a dominant position in the lives of younger generations, becoming core arenas in which opinions and cultural perspectives are formed. Third, a generational gap in cultivating emerging museum professionals has become evident, manifested both in organizational imbalances and in a widening discrepancy between academic training and the practical competencies required in the field. Although younger generations show strong potential in digital skills and cultural creativity, their preparation in organizational processes, curatorial decision-making, understanding of the broader cultural field, and the cultivation of practical professional capacities often falls short of institutional expectations.

This paper does not claim that a single course can comprehensively address all of these dimensions. Instead, it focuses on curatorial practice and narrative construction as a strategic entry point for understanding and nurturing museum professional capacities within the constraints of a semester-long undergraduate course. The study is motivated by the observation that current educational approaches to cultivating museum professionals in Taiwan continue to rely on traditional humanities-based knowledge training, with insufficient emphasis on practice-based experience and real-world problem-solving. If museums themselves operate as learning spaces outside formal systems, should higher education continue to depend on standardized, formalized methods to prepare future museum professionals, or is there a need to reconfigure pedagogical approaches that better reflect the complexity of museum work?

From an educator's standpoint, these observations are hard to ignore. Building on this reflection, the paper addresses three guiding research questions: (1) How do undergraduate students in related programs in Taiwan understand curatorship and museum professionalism through classroom learning? (2) What specific learning gaps emerge in a museum studies course with respect to curatorial practice, narrative construction, and sensitivity to cultural contexts? (3) How might educators redesign curatorship-centered courses to narrow the distance between educational settings and professional practice?

This article argues that museum education cannot adequately prepare future professionals by relying on established theoretical frameworks alone—particularly when the pace of technological change has outrun the pace of pedagogical theory. Drawing on an action research course in which generative AI was integrated as a curatorial learning partner, the study proposes that practice-oriented, adaptive pedagogy offers a more viable path for cultivating the professional judgment and cultural responsiveness that contemporary museum work demands. To respond to these questions, the study employs an undergraduate museum studies course as its research site and adopts action research as its primary methodology.

Drawing on double-loop learning and scaffolding theories, the course design integrates generative artificial intelligence as a key partner to support students' curatorial thinking. Centered on the theme of hometown food and cultural memory, the course guides students

through a series of staged learning activities in which they develop exhibition concepts, co-write interpretive texts with AI support, and engage with simulated real-world challenges that prompt them to reflect on their professional judgments and cultural positioning. In this course design, AI is conceptualized as a learning scaffold rather than a replacement for human curatorship. By analyzing classroom processes and student outcomes, the paper seeks to offer a teaching-practice example grounded in the Taiwanese context and to reconsider how the pathways for cultivating museum professionals might be reimaged under conditions of digital transformation and generational change.

Rethinking educational contexts in the age of AI

Over the past decade, global educational ecosystems have undergone two intertwined transformations. On the one hand, the rapid renewal of knowledge and skills has prompted many countries to reconsider the core purposes of schooling. On the other hand, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence has further reshaped modes of learning and knowledge production. Against this backdrop, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched the *Future of Education and Skills 2030* initiative in 2015, which has since become a significant international framework for rethinking education. The initiative emphasizes that future education should move beyond the transmission of knowledge and skills alone, and instead foster learners' attitudes and values, enabling them to create new value, reconcile tensions, and take responsibility in contexts characterized by uncertainty (OECD, 2019).

Within this broader context, the OECD framework can be read as a navigation map for future learning. It not only outlines an educational vision centered on student well-being but also offers broad directions for curriculum design and classroom implementation. Its core structure, the *OECD Learning Compass 2030*, is organized around four dimensions—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values—and is illuminated by three transformative competencies: creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility (OECD, 2019). Together, these elements sketch a future-oriented education that emphasizes both individual well-being and social participation.

The first phase of the OECD initiative (2015–2019) focused on the development of the *Learning Compass 2030*. Taiwan's recent curriculum reforms may be seen as entering dialogue with this international framework. The emphasis on competency-based learning resonates closely with the transformative competencies articulated in the *Learning Compass 2030*, particularly in its aim to equip young learners with the capacities to create new value, navigate tensions and dilemmas, and assume responsibility (Yen, 2024). In its second phase, the OECD introduced the *Teaching Framework for 2030*, shifting attention toward how teachers enact competency-oriented principles in classroom practice. This framework advocates focusing on core concepts, simplifying curricular themes, and allowing key ideas to recur across learning activities, thereby strengthening students' conceptual understanding and their ability to transfer knowledge across contexts (OECD, 2024). For museum pedagogy specifically, these principles suggest that professional training should move away from comprehensive content coverage toward sustained engagement with a small number of core curatorial competencies including narrative construction, cultural positioning, and interpretive decision-making among them that developed iteratively and applied across multiple simulated and real-world contexts.

Despite its global appeal, the OECD framework has also prompted critical reflection regarding its applicability across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Rappleye (2024) argues that the initiative insufficiently accounts for differences in national and cultural contexts, and that educational settings in Asia—particularly professional cultural sites such as museums—require more localized pedagogical strategies. For museum education, which relies heavily on cultural specificity and situated practice, this tension is especially pronounced. Although global frameworks provide valuable orientation, the substantive cultivation of core competencies cannot be achieved through classroom instruction alone; rather, it depends on sustained and meaningful engagement with the world beyond formal schooling.

Alongside policy and curriculum debates, educational practice is increasingly shaped by assumptions about the learning characteristics of younger generations, commonly with the so-called digital native generation. Prensky (2001) introduced the term *digital natives* to describe young people who have grown up immersed in the internet and mobile technologies, suggesting that they are particularly adept at information retrieval, multitasking, and online interaction, and that they tend to favor rapid and non-linear learning processes. Subsequent research, however, has cautioned against the oversimplification inherent in generational labels. While students born after 2000 now constitute the primary population in higher education and generally demonstrate a high degree of familiarity with digital tools, significant differences remain in their digital competencies and critical literacy skills (Bennett, 2008). Nevertheless, the ways in which young people interact with cultural objects have been visibly shaped by digital media and platform cultures. In museum settings, students may respond quickly to visual highlights and social media circulation yet show limited patience for engaging deeply with the historical contexts and power relations embedded in curatorial narratives.

The rapid diffusion of generative AI has further transformed how students engage with knowledge. Recent studies indicate that generative AI is reshaping learning and assessment practices in higher education, creating opportunities for personalized learning and pedagogical innovation, while simultaneously posing challenges to academic integrity and critical thinking (Francis, 2025). Without appropriate instructional design and guidance, students may come to treat AI-generated outputs as self-evident sources of knowledge, overlooking the biases and limitations embedded within algorithmic systems. Lee and Low (2024) argue that universities should not avoid AI but rather actively incorporate generative AI as a pedagogical tool to challenge and cultivate students' critical thinking and interpersonal engagement. They demonstrate how generative AI can be integrated into different types of courses, such as having students work in groups to complete tasks using ChatGPT; revise AI-generated drafts according to critical thinking criteria, such as clarity and accuracy; and conduct peer evaluation in class.

Critical literacy (CL) research offers a theoretical lens for examining how AI reshapes educational practices beyond questions of technical efficiency. Kellner and Share (2019) contend that media literacy should extend beyond the interpretation of messages to include critical examination of the power relations, ideologies, and politics of representation that shape media production. As generative AI technologies increasingly permeate everyday life and learning environments, critical approaches to media reading have expanded into discussions of critical literacy in the digital environment.

Veldhuis (2024), in a scoping review of *critical AI literacy*, emphasizes that AI literacy should not be confined to technical proficiency, but must also encompass awareness of bias, discrimination, and power structures. Within learning environments organized around *critical computational literacy* (CCL), young people can gradually emerge as critical problem-solvers who integrate technical knowledge with critical consciousness, enabling them to leverage digital tools for social transformation (Lee & Soep, 2016). In such contexts, teachers play a crucial role in creating curricular spaces where these issues can be examined and questioned, rather than treated as inevitable outcomes of technological progress.

Taken together, these three bodies of discussion point toward a challenge that is not simply shared with higher education at large but is felt with particular acuity in museum education. The field has long grounded professional training in deep theoretical knowledge of collections, history, cultural interpretation, and institutional practice. That grounding remains essential, and the gradual shift from technical vocational preparation toward critically engaged museological inquiry has been one of the more significant developments in the field over recent decades (Lorente, 2012). However, when the learning habits of younger generations have been shaped by platforms that reward speed and fragmentation, and when generative AI can now produce exhibition texts, curatorial rationales, and interpretive frameworks on demand, the question of what museum education is actually cultivating becomes harder to avoid.

Technical knowledge can be retrieved, and theoretical frameworks can be generated. What cannot easily be automated is the capacity to make situated judgments, to read a cultural context, to decide what a community needs from an object, to take responsibility for a narrative, and so on. Research on the digital transformation of museum workforces has shown persistently that the competencies demanded by contemporary practice are outpacing what formal training provides, and that the gap is not primarily technical but concerns the agile, adaptive, integrative capacities. (Carvalho et al., 2018). Whether current approaches, which have changed relatively slowly in comparison to the technological environments graduates will enter, are enough to accomplish that task is a question worth sitting with. The pedagogical design explored in this study does not claim to resolve it. However, it suggests that engaging students with the tensions and limitations of AI, rather than simply prohibiting or uncritically adopting it, may be one way to keep curatorial judgment at the center of museum professional training.

Methodology and classroom observations

This study adopts action research as its primary methodological approach. Action research emphasizes the dual role of the researcher as both investigator and practitioner, requiring continuous reflection and adaptive adjustment within real-world contexts to address specific problems (Arnold & Norton, 2018). This approach is particularly suited to the present study, which seeks to respond to the gap between educational training and professional demands in museum practice. In this research, the author also serves as the course instructor and follows the core cyclical process of action research, including planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and feeding insights back into subsequent cycles of re-planning. Through this process, the researcher analyzes learning challenges observed in the classroom and examines whether these challenges align with professional expectations in museum practice, thereby developing teaching strategies and learning frameworks that more closely reflect practical contexts and workplace realities.

From March to June 2025, the researcher conducted participant observation during the first four weeks of the course. The cohort consisted of 60 students from first to fourth year. approximately 66% were majoring in culture-related departments, while 34% were students from other disciplines taking the course as an elective. This study focuses on curatorial practice as one of the foundational competencies in museum work. Based on classroom observations during the initial four weeks, three major learning difficulties were identified:

- First, students' understanding of museum curation and its practical operations often remained at a superficial level. While it is expected that first-year students in introductory courses may lack sufficient grounding in museum studies, similar patterns were also observed among upper-year students, suggesting that the gap cannot be attributed solely to differences in learning stages. Many students tended to equate curatorial practice with the visible aspects of exhibition viewing, approaching exhibitions primarily from a visitor's perspective. As a result, they struggled to envision the strategic, organizational, and operational dimensions of exhibition work, leading to a noticeable disconnect between classroom learning and the professional competencies required in future museum workplaces.
- Second, students frequently encountered breaks in curatorial logic. Evidence from class discussions, written assignments, and project work showed a tendency toward fragmentation and lack of coherence in theme development, argumentative structure, and narrative flow. This phenomenon may be related to habits formed in digital media environments where information is consumed in disjointed, bite-sized segments, making it difficult for students to sustain long-term, in-depth engagement with a single topic. Coupled with still-developing capacities for independent thinking and critical interpretation, these habits limited the depth and completeness of students' curatorial proposals.
- Third, students demonstrated a limited understanding of the operational realities of cultural and museum-related fields. Many were unfamiliar with the broader ecosystem of the museum sector, including organizational structures, operational mechanisms, and potential career pathways. This lack of contextual awareness made it difficult for students to establish clear connections between learning objectives and professional expectations, which in turn affected the formation of their career aspirations and levels of engagement.

In response to these observed learning challenges and the disconnect between education and professional practice, this study integrates double-loop learning with scaffolding learning as a dynamic pedagogical design strategy. Through the problem-oriented and value-reflective processes emphasized in double-loop learning, students are guided to reconsider and reconstruct their understanding of curation and the social functions of museums. Scaffolding strategies are implemented through staged task design, exemplars, guiding questions, and digitally supported learning tools, enabling students to progressively accumulate practical experience and composite competencies within a manageable range of difficulty.

Pedagogical frameworks and course design in practice

Double-loop learning and scaffolding theory

The practical design of this course is grounded in double-loop learning as its overarching pedagogical framework, complemented by scaffolding theory to support instructional implementation. Although double-loop learning and scaffolding originate from distinct theoretical traditions—the former rooted in organizational learning and action science, and the latter grounded in cognitive psychology and instructional design—they are highly complementary in pedagogical practice. In the present course design, double-loop learning primarily addresses processes of value reflection, while scaffolding focuses on supporting students' learning trajectories.

Double-loop learning emerged from theories of organizational learning and was developed by action science scholars Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön (Argyris, 1977) and later extended by Peter M. Senge as a foundational framework for organizational learning and creative thinking (Senge, 1997). This theory suggests that while single-loop learning enables learners to adjust actions and acquire basic skills and operational logic, double-loop learning further encourages learners to question underlying assumptions and knowledge structures. Through this process, learners gradually develop the capacity to act within complex and situated cultural contexts.

A key feature of double-loop learning is its emphasis on feedback and reflection on mental models. Rather than merely correcting actions in response to new problems, learners are guided to examine the deeper structures that shape how problems are defined and addressed, thereby enabling more profound learning and innovation. Senge's (1997) notion of "reflecting on mental models" is particularly relevant to museum-related courses. It reminds educators that students should not only learn how to produce a technically complete curatorial proposal but also be guided to ask critical questions such as "Why do I choose this theme?" and "What audiences and values are presupposed by this narrative?" In this sense, pedagogical practice should support a shift from the technical proficiency emphasized in single-loop learning toward the value reflection central to double-loop learning.

In addition to double-loop learning, this study incorporates scaffolding theory as proposed by Wood et al. (1976) into the course design. The core of scaffolding lies in the provision of temporary support by instructors, enabling learners to engage with task components that exceed their current level of independent capability while allowing them to focus on aspects they can manage. Wood et al. (1976) identify several key functions of scaffolding, including recruitment, reduction in degrees of freedom, direction maintenance, marking critical features, frustration control, and demonstration. Through strategies such as questioning, modeling, paraphrasing, and task decomposition, scaffolding helps learners accomplish tasks that they would not be able to complete on their own.

In this course, scaffolding is operationalized through two primary forms: structural scaffolding and interactive scaffolding. Structural scaffolding begins with topic exploration and personal narratives, followed by thematic extraction and the organization of exhibition narratives. At a subsequent level, instructor-provided curatorial exemplars, such as presentation templates and guiding questions for defining audience profiles, are introduced to help students understand the focus and expectations at each stage of the process. Interactive scaffolding, by contrast, centers on dialogue within the classroom,

including instructor–student interactions, peer feedback within groups, and specially designed AI-based dialogue tasks. These interactions are intended to help students identify blind spots and alternative possibilities in their thinking through engagement with multiple forms of “otherness.”

Overall, the course design does not simply reduce curatorial practice to a sequence of technical steps. Rather, it further positions generative AI as a form of scaffolding in the role of a curatorial partner, supporting interactions between the instructor and individual learners. Within the context of this study, double-loop learning attends to whether students can interrogate and revise the mental models and value assumptions that underpin their actions, while scaffolding theory focuses on how instructors can temporarily support students in confronting challenges beyond their current independent capabilities through task decomposition, prompts, and modeling. The former opens space for students to rethink established assumptions about museums, curation, and publics while the latter enables them to gradually accumulate practical experience and composite curatorial judgment through staged assignments, curatorial text exemplars, and collaborative dialogue with AI.

Course design

The project-based task in this course is organized around a broadly accessible theme: *local food and cultural memory*, which all students can engage with through personal experience. This theme is used as a simulated curatorial context through which students learn how narrative elements can be integrated into cultural project design to enhance the communicative and affective appeal of curatorial outcomes. While the course spans an 18-week semester, this instructional unit is designed as a six-week module, comprising four weeks of structured, six-stage practice followed by two weeks of peer sharing and discussion. Each weekly session is two hours long.

Previous studies have identified personalized learning as one of the key applications and benefits of AI in educational contexts, as it allows learning processes to be more responsive to individual needs. At the same time, the integration of AI into teaching requires careful consideration of accessibility, transparency, and fairness, to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, can benefit from such technologies (Harry, 2023). Accordingly, the selection of generative AI tools in this study was shaped by the technological conditions at the time of course implementation. ChatGPT was, at that point, the most widely available, stable, and freely accessible model and could be used by all students without additional barriers. For these reasons, it was adopted as the primary AI-supported learning tool in this course.

Building on the combined framework of double-loop learning and scaffolding theory, classroom practice is structured into six main stages: introduction, setup, inspiration, collaboration, simulation, and reflection. Generative AI is intentionally positioned as a supportive tool for curatorial learning, assisting students in gradually developing curatorial thinking and forms of disciplinary expression, while also enabling them to extract key professional competencies required in museum practice through simulated scenarios. The six stages are outlined as follows.



Figure 1. Student-generated concept image of an AI-assisted digital curatorial design for an interactive experience area themed around a 1950s Hakka kitchen.

1. **Introduction:** The instructor introduces foundational disciplinary knowledge and core concepts related to curation and museum practice.
2. **Setup (Building from Scratch):** Each group establishes a shared AI project space and provides the AI with information about individual members' backgrounds and areas of expertise. The AI is explicitly assigned the role of a curatorial team partner.
3. **Inspiration:** Drawing on a framework prepared in advance by the instructor, students extend this structure by engaging in dialogue with the AI curatorial partner. This stage supports idea generation, thematic exploration, and the articulation of preliminary curatorial concepts.
4. **Collaboration:** Students are supported in using multiple Taiwanese cultural databases for data collection and textual analysis relevant to their curatorial projects, as well as for the co-writing of exhibition texts in collaboration with the AI.
5. **Simulation (Scenario-Based Learning):** Through scenarios designed by the instructor, students are presented with possible situations that may arise in real-world cultural practice. Groups discuss these scenarios with their AI curatorial partner and engage in simulated decision-making processes, such as anticipating audience responses, identifying potential audience needs, and conducting stress tests of their curatorial proposals.
6. **Reflection:** Groups engage in peer feedback and collective reflection, considering whether their current proposals should be refined or revised. In this stage, teams are required to consider the complexity of cultural practice as well as the feasibility of AI-generated suggestions before making final curatorial decisions.

These six stages are implemented across the weekly course schedule. The corresponding instructional arrangements and instructor-designed guiding questions for each stage are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Course implementation stages and instructional design for week two

Stage	Learning Objective	Learning Activities	Instructor-Designed Guiding Prompts
Stage 2-1 Setting Up the AI Curatorial Partner	Students register for a ChatGPT account and establish a dedicated project-based dialogue space	Each group creates a shared dialogue space for this project. Students define prompts that assign ChatGPT the role of a curatorial partner for their team. Each group member introduces their individual background and experience related to curation to the AI.	Sample prompts for ChatGPT: 1. "You are now a member of our team and will act as our digital curatorial partner." 2. "You specialize in assisting with proposals related to cultural technology and virtual exhibitions." 3. "Please provide suggestions regarding exhibition themes, object selection, and modes of display."
Stage 3-1 Defining Curatorial Goals and Themes: Theme Selection and Initial Exploration	Students select local food and cultural memory as the curatorial theme and use ChatGPT to support creative ideation and goal-oriented inquiry	Explore distinctive food cultures and memories across different historical periods, regions, and cultural contexts. Students share personal stories related to local food and collectively decide on the most suitable topic for a digital exhibition. Students also consult the AI curatorial partner for suggestions on which local food from their hometowns may serve as an effective exhibition theme.	Sample prompts related to curatorial themes: 1. "Among the local food stories within our team, which ones do you think are most suitable for transformation into a digital exhibition theme?" 2. "Do you think Wen-shan Baoz-hong tea from Taipei would be an appropriate exhibition theme?" 3. "How might the historical narrative of Tainan dan-zai noodles be made more engaging for audiences?" 4. "How could a specific local food from a particular city be connected to cultural memory to form a compelling exhibition theme?"
Stage 3-2 Defining Curatorial Goals and Themes: Goal Setting	Students collaborate with the AI curatorial partner to simulate and formulate exhibition goals	Students define one to two primary exhibition goals from perspectives such as operation, education, entertainment, festivals, or cultural communication. Students consider how different curatorial goals may influence exhibition direction and implementation strategies. Students reflect on the category of their curatorial project and identify relevant curatorial elements that require attention.	Sample prompts related to curatorial goals: 1. "If our curatorial goal is to help more people understand the story of [X], how might we refine our theme?" 2. "If we aim to focus on social media dissemination and marketing through this theme, what adjustments would you suggest?" 3. "How can we balance cultural depth with audience engagement when setting curatorial goals?" 4. "What different expectations might audiences of different age groups have regarding local food narratives?" 5. "Is this curatorial theme accessible to international audiences, or does it require additional cultural context?"
Stage 3-3 Iterative Adjustment: Evaluating the AI Curatorial Partner	Students collectively reflect on the performance of the AI curatorial partner	Discuss how the AI curatorial partner's responses could be improved in the next stage.	Revise prompts and dialogue strategies as needed. Evaluate whether the assigned AI role requires further refinement. Enrich and deepen the curatorial ideas, design elements, and conceptual input provided by the group.

Synthesizing qualitative findings and pedagogical reflection

A UNESCO policy working paper, *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development*, highlights the potential of artificial intelligence to improve learning outcomes and promote educational equity through the strategic leveraging of AI (Pedro et al., 2019). At the same time, the report emphasizes that AI is unlikely to replace teachers; rather, it is expected to reshape the teaching profession. Educational systems are therefore urged to support teachers in developing new competencies that enable them to understand and use AI as a pedagogical support. The report also acknowledges that empirical evidence regarding the actual effectiveness of AI in education remains limited, particularly in contexts within developing regions, and that further research is needed to identify which instructional strategies are genuinely effective.

At the conclusion of the project-based unit, student groups presented their work through face-to-face classroom sharing. Prior to these sessions, the instructor reviewed each group's AI project dialogue records and curatorial materials. During the presentations, a structured process of reflective dialogue was incorporated into classroom discussion. Through real-time questioning and feedback, students were encouraged not only to complete their project tasks but also to reflect more deeply on the cultural values and interpretive frameworks embedded in their curatorial decisions.

Within this theoretical framework, generative AI was positioned in the course as a curatorial partner for students, functioning as a scaffold with a clearly defined role. Rather than treating AI as a technological instrument capable of replacing curatorial expertise, this study approaches AI as a learning partner whose functions can be deliberately designed, adjusted, and critically examined. This pedagogical choice also responds to the structural constraints of large undergraduate classrooms, in which it is often difficult for instructors to provide sustained, individualized guidance. In this context, AI serves as an intermediary that supports interaction between instructors and students.

In practical terms, the course assigned different functions to AI at different stages of learning. During the inspiration stage, students engaged with AI to discuss personal memories and cultural associations related to food from their hometowns. Through keywords and follow-up questions generated by the AI, students were able to identify narrative threads that had previously gone unnoticed. During the theme development stage, AI was used to generate multiple possible exhibition titles and sub-themes, prompting students to practice articulating the reasons behind their selections and exclusions through processes of comparison and evaluation. During the writing stage, AI provided only preliminary drafts focused on language and structure; students remained responsible for verifying contextual accuracy, refining narrative tone, and incorporating their own perspectives and judgments.

Crucially, the course did not encourage students to place unquestioned trust in AI-generated suggestions. Instead, several curatorial ethics questions were intentionally designed for discussion among students, AI, and group members. Students were asked to observe whether AI produced misplaced, overly simplified, or excessively generalized narratives, and to identify the underlying issues in such outputs. Through this pedagogical design, AI functioned not only as a scaffold supporting students' expressive abilities but also as a catalyst for critical thinking and media literacy. This approach aligns with global calls for strengthening AI literacy in education, while grounding these concerns within a museum course centered on curatorial practice.

As part of the project unit, the researcher specifically required each group to reflect on the role and effectiveness of AI as a curatorial partner. Student feedback revealed a considerable degree of critical awareness and evaluative capacity. Selected responses are presented below:

- Through working with AI, we found that it can quickly generate responses that address the core of our questions. However, the factual accuracy of news or historical information, as well as the practical feasibility of curatorial proposals, still requires human filtering and reflection. While the AI curatorial partner provided sufficient initial information, some details needed to be verified through other sources. (Anonymous Student A)
- Although the AI curatorial partner could respond to our questions, it was unable to offer a clear or stable direction. (Anonymous Student B)
- The AI curatorial partner produced responses that were repetitive and highly varied, which required group members to further organize and negotiate a clear direction. (Anonymous Student C)
- The AI curatorial partner was not always practical in curatorial terms, but its closing questions in dialogue were highly interactive. (Anonymous Student D)

These reflections indicate that students developed an emerging level of media literacy and critical thinking over the course of the project and were able to clearly recognize the supportive role played by AI in curatorial processes. In this course, AI functioned as an invisible staircase, a scaffolding tool that supported students' learning by offering stage-specific linguistic assistance and content generation. At the same time, it provided an entry point for both practical experimentation and reflective inquiry. The integration of double-loop learning with scaffolding strategies aimed not only to support the acquisition of foundational professional skills, but also to encourage students to consider the multiple conditions of cultural practice. Through reflective learning, students were guided to actively adjust curatorial strategies and to consider how museum knowledge might be meaningfully bridged with practical professional demands.

At the level of museum education more broadly, these findings raise a question that goes beyond course design. The students in this study were not unusually motivated or specially selected; they were a typical mixed class in the university, the kind of context in which much museum-related undergraduate education takes place. That students were able to develop critical awareness of AI's limitations within a structured pedagogical environment suggests that practice-oriented course design can cultivate forms of reflective judgment that conventional museum studies instruction rarely makes room for. Efforts to redesign museum studies programs have often found that consulting practitioners and graduates reveals a strong preference for assignments that simulate real professional tasks, suggesting that the appetite for practice-oriented learning exists, but the structural conditions to support it are frequently absent (Thomas et al., 2018).

If museum education has been slow to incorporate practice-oriented, technologically engaged approaches, the obstacle may be less about what students can do and more about the assumptions embedded in how we teach. The present study suggests that rethinking those assumptions is both possible and urgent, particularly given that the museums these graduates will enter are already operating in the technological environment that their training has yet to seriously engage with. The study reported here is necessarily limited in

scale and context. But it does suggest that a reorientation is possible, and that the place to begin may be less with curriculum reform than with a willingness to let the tensions of contemporary practice into the classroom.

Conclusion and directions for future research

This study examines how intentional course and learning design within educational settings can narrow the gap between students' understanding of museum-related professional competencies and the practical demands of curatorial work. Drawing on double-loop learning theory, the study further responds to the persistent disconnect between academic training and professional practice that characterizes contemporary museum talent development.

During the design and implementation of the course, an observation emerged that is worth noting. Under Taiwan's higher education system, students are required to complete end-of-semester evaluations of their instructors. The researcher found that in this course, more than half of the student feedback focused on the curatorial competencies they had developed and on how the course encouraged deeper reflection on curatorial questions. Beyond improvements in the practical feasibility of their curatorial proposals, students were prompted to consider how, in addition to organizing cultural content in digital formats, they might further excavate authentic and personalized narrative threads to enhance the credibility of their curatorial work. This pattern of feedback suggests that the course design effectively fostered students' engagement with and reflection on curatorial practice.

What this study suggests for museum education more broadly is less a model to be replicated than a disposition to be reconsidered. The course design described here worked not because it found a way to make AI fit into existing museum pedagogy, but because it treated the tensions that AI introduces as the substance of learning rather than obstacles to it, which is between speed and depth, between generated content and situated judgment. Museum education has historically been good at transmitting what the profession knows. The harder and more pressing question is whether it is preparing graduates who can navigate what the profession does not yet know how to handle.

None of this requires abandoning the theoretical foundations that give museum education its depth and seriousness. It does suggest, however, that those foundations need to be put to work in contexts where students encounter the actual conditions of contemporary practice, including the presence of powerful tools they did not ask for and cannot ignore. The graduates who will staff tomorrow's museums are already living in a technologically transformed world. The question for museum education is not whether to respond to that world, but how to do so without losing sight of what the profession is ultimately for.

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Our cover this issue: To build their honeycombs, bees “festoon,” building bee-bridges from old to new. It is speculated that festooning allows them to not only construct but to determine the best size and direction to map out the new comb. Bees build their new home together, holding each other in a chain from what is existing to what is to come. To us this is an apt metaphor for museologists working together across the globe with the next generation of museum professionals, determining best directions to build solid new structures of museological skills for the coming decades.

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