

Museums in Action: How Museums are redefining their Role in European Projects

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Abstract

An innovative and detailed analysis of the role of museums in European Union-funded projects is presented in this article, based on a thorough search of the European CORDIS database. The study explores how museums have transformed from being passive custodians of cultural heritage to becoming dynamic and multifunctional actors in European research and innovation. Through a systematic analysis of European projects funded in the 2007-2022 period, the article highlights the growing participation of museums in various EU programs, the varied roles they assume—from beneficiary partners to associate collaborators—and their impact in key areas such as education, research, digitization and technological innovation. This research provides both quantitative and qualitative insights into museums' involvement in shaping European cultural identity and policy development. The paper is of particular interest to policy makers, museum professionals and cultural heritage researchers, offering a unique perspective on the evolving role of museums in the European context and future opportunities for collaboration and funding.

Keywords: *European project, Museum, CORDIS, European Union, European Research and Innovation.*

Introduction

The European Union has long funded cultural heritage projects through various programs and initiatives to preserve, conserve and promote Europe's diverse cultural heritage. The following is a brief overview of the history of European funding for cultural heritage. In the 1970s, the European Union (EU) began to recognize the importance of cultural heritage and its contribution to promoting a common European identity and shared values (Council of the Europe, 1973).

The inclusion of the concept of European cultural heritage in the EU agenda in 1974 was an attempt to anchor European identity beyond abstract political principles (European Parliament, 1974a, 1974 b).

The establishment of the Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975 provided financial support for the restoration and development of cultural heritage sites in economically deprived regions.

The European Cultural Foundation, founded in 1954, also played a role in supporting cultural initiatives across Europe (Council of Europe, 1954).

The Maastricht Treaty (European Union, 1992) of 1992 was an important step towards integrating cultural heritage into EU policies and funding programs. It recognized cultural heritage as an essential component of European integration.

The EU Structural Funds, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), have provided financial support for projects in the fields of cultural heritage, regional development and tourism.

In 1997, the EU launched the 'Culture 2000' programs, which ran until 2006. The programs aimed to promote cultural cooperation and support cross-border projects in various artistic and cultural fields.

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The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 was an innovative initiative that raised awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and its role in fostering a sense of belonging and a common European identity. Suffice to say that during the European Year of Cultural Heritage, Erasmus+ provided almost

92 million euros for 965 heritage-related cooperation and mobility projects. The programs focus on mobility projects, virtual exchanges, organizational cooperation and partnerships, as well as supporting policy cooperation at EU level.

The Creative Europe programs, launched in 2014, are the EU's main source of funding for the cultural and creative sectors. It focuses on three main objectives: protecting, developing and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage in Europe, strengthening the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audiovisual sector, and contributing to the recovery of these sectors by supporting their efforts to become more inclusive, digital and environmentally sustainable.

The European Structural and Investment Funds (EIS Funds), which are jointly managed by the European Commission and the Member States, invest in various sectors, including culture and creativity, to create growth and jobs. For example, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) continues to provide financial support for the restoration and enhancement of cultural heritage sites, particularly in less developed regions.

The Horizon Europe programs, which started in 2021, provide funding for research and innovation projects related to cultural heritage preservation, digitalization and sustainable tourism. A key component is Cluster 2 of Horizon Europe, entitled 'Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society'.

This cluster focuses on funding research and innovation projects that promote better access to cultural heritage, improve its protection and support job creation in the creative industries. The European Commission offers various funding opportunities under Horizon Europe provide various funding opportunities for projects related to cultural heritage and the cultural and creative industries.

One notable project of the European Commission is the European Heritage Hub. This new initiative is a pilot project to mobilize and strengthen a heritage-led movement in Europe. The European Heritage Hub aims to be a platform for knowledge exchange, networking, training, capacity building and promotion of cultural heritage stakeholders at European, national and regional level. This project aims to engage citizens, especially the new generation of heritage professionals, in European cultural heritage. It builds on the success of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage.

Overall, European funding for cultural heritage has evolved and expanded over the years. These funding programs are increasingly aimed at supporting the protection, preservation, accessibility and promotion of Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage for present and future generations.

This reflects the growing recognition of the importance of cultural heritage in promoting social, economic and cultural development in Europe.

The article provides a detailed analysis of the involvement of museums in European planning using the European Union's CORDIS database.

Through this primarily data-driven approach, the article emphasizes the increasingly important role that these institutions play in various aspects of social, cultural and educational life in Europe. The authors emphasize how museums not only preserve historical and cultural heritage, but also actively contribute to development and innovation in the social and educational fields, thus playing a fundamental role in the European cultural fabric.

Materials and Methods

The approach chosen was that of a scoping review, a systematic approach to assess the state of museum involvement in European planning and provide an overview of the scope of the phenomenon.

For this study, the authors used the CORDIS database, the official database of the European Union. This database made it possible to identify and map the landscape of EU-funded projects related to museums, to collect a variety of information on projects and to obtain information on different aspects of museum work and innovation in Europe.

However, the CORDIS database does not contain some relevant information, such as the role of museums within each project. Therefore, the authors supplemented the search with other sources such as project and museum websites to ensure a complete understanding of each project.

A systematic approach was adopted to ensure the comprehensiveness and transparency of the research, which aimed to analyse the role of museums in EU-funded projects. A comprehensive list of all European projects containing the keywords 'museum(s)' AND 'cultural' AND 'heritage' AND 'gallery(ies)' AND 'archive(s)' AND 'botanical' AND 'garden(s)' AND 'exhibition(s)' AND 'collection(s)' was extracted from the Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS) website. The list of projects was downloaded on 10 January 2024, covering the years 2007 to 2022, when the data is complete.

An initial categorization of the projects, based solely on the analysis of the titles and summaries, made it possible to delimit the predominant themes and to place each project in a specific category, the details of which are explained in the next section of the article.

Finally, the data from the selected projects were analyzed in depth to identify key themes. The projects were categorized according to common characteristics, such as the role they play within the project and the type of activities carried out. This categorization was further refined by analyzing supplementary data, including detailed activity reports, full project results and descriptions published on the projects' and museums' websites, where available. This process made it possible to correct and optimize the match between the projects and the most appropriate categories.

Based on this analysis, the authors were able to categorize the role of museums participating in European projects as follows:

Educational programs and public involvement: these are the museums participating in the projects as educational institutions, with a wide range of public involvement programs and activities, including exhibitions, workshops, lectures, guided tours and educational resources. In the European projects analyzed, museums had/have a crucial role in the development and implementation of educational programs for cultural understanding, heritage appreciation and active citizenship. These programs are often aimed at different target groups, including students, families, tourists and marginalized communities.

Research and knowledge creation: These are museums that engage in research activities that contribute to the expansion of knowledge in areas such as archaeology, art history, anthropology and conservation. In European projects, museums collaborate with research institutes, universities and experts to carry out research on cultural heritage issues. The results of their research contribute to the understanding and interpretation of European cultural heritage and shape the narratives and strategies of European projects.

Digitization and access to cultural heritage: European projects often focus on digitizing cultural heritage and making it accessible to a wider public. The museums involved have played or are playing a key role in these projects by digitizing their collections, contributing to databases and online platforms and developing digital exhibitions and interactive experiences. Through digitization, museums are improving

access to cultural heritage resources and enabling people from all over Europe and the world to explore and learn about European history and culture.

Innovation and technology: Museums actively promote innovation and technology in their operations and exhibitions. In European projects, the partner museums contribute to the development and implementation of innovative approaches, such as augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive displays and multimedia installations. They integrate technology into exhibitions and interpretation programs to enhance the visitor experience and appeal to a diverse audience, including younger generations.

Collaboration and networking: Museums actively participate in European projects by collaborating with other museums, cultural institutions, research organizations and communities across Europe. This cooperation facilitates the exchange of knowledge, the sharing of best practices and joint initiatives to preserve, interpret and promote cultural heritage. Museums bring their unique perspectives and expertise to strengthen the collective efforts of European projects.

Preservation and presentation of cultural heritage: Museums are repositories of cultural heritage, preserving and displaying tangible and intangible aspects of European history, art, traditions and identity. They contribute to European projects by sharing their collections, expertise and knowledge with project partners and stakeholders. Museums provide valuable information about the cultural heritage of their regions and thus contribute to a broader understanding of European history and diversity.

Policy development and advocacy: Museums actively participate in the development of policies and initiatives to promote cultural heritage at the European level. They provide expertise, guidance and recommendations to policy makers, ensuring that the interests and perspectives of museums are taken into account in European cultural policies, funding programs and regulations.

Results

22.598 results for 'museum(s)' AND 'culture' AND 'heritage' AND 'gallery(ies)' AND 'archive(s)' AND 'botanical' AND 'garden(s)' AND 'exhibition(s)' AND 'collection(s)' were extracted from CORDIS. In 672 funded projects at least one museum was involved as a beneficiary partner, in 15 projects a botanical garden was involved as a beneficiary.

For the remaining projects, the keywords used were indicated in the summary, but the partnership had no museums as partners.

The following is a comprehensive overview of the participation of museums in the different calls of the EU programs in the period 2007-2022.

Table 1 provides an analysis of the participation of the different types of beneficiary partners in the different EU programs examined in this paper. Museums represent 0.08% of the partners involved in funded projects that fulfill the above characteristics during the period considered.

Table 1: Number of Museums Participating in Funded European Projects, By Programs (2007-2022)

EU Programs	Consortium (Total number of Beneficiary Partners)	Museums as Beneficiary Partners	Botanic Gardens as Beneficiary Partners	Other Beneficiary Partners (non-museum)
Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programs (CIP)	536	79	3	456
Sixth Framework Programs for Research and Technological Development (FP6)	61	6	0	55
Seven Framework Programs for Research and	1.418	117	21	1.302

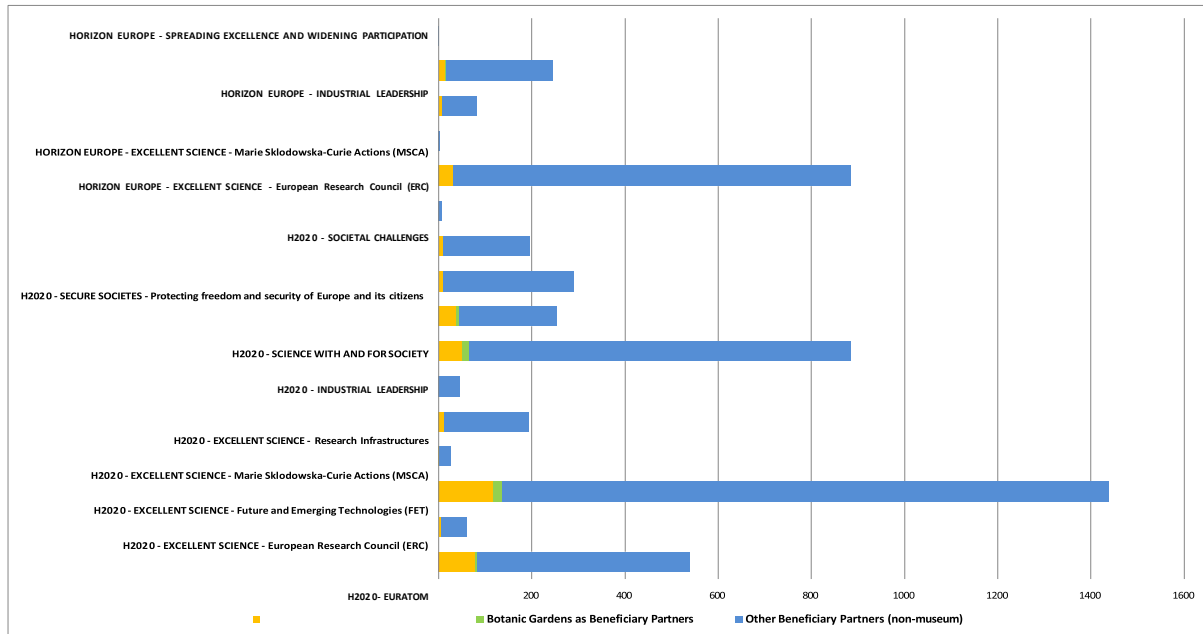
Technological Development (FP7)				
H2020- EURATOM	25	1	0	24
H2020 - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - European Research Council (ERC)	193	11	0	182
H2020 - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - Future and Emerging Technologies (FET)	52	0	0	46
H2020 - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)	870	52	15	819
H2020 - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - Research Infrastructures	247	39	5	208
H2020 - INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP	291	10	0	281
H2020 - SCIENCE WITH AND FOR SOCIETY	196	10	0	185
H2020 - SECURE SOCIETIES - Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens	8	0	0	8
H2020 - SOCIETAL CHALLENGES	883	32	0	852
HORIZON EUROPE - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - European Research Council (ERC)	3	0	0	3
HORIZON EUROPE - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)	81	6	0	75
HORIZON EUROPE - INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP	245	15	2	229
HORIZON EUROPE - SPREADING EXCELLENCE AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION	1	0	0	1
TOTALE	5.110	378	46	4.726

Source: Own elaboration (CORDIS data)

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the participation of museums as beneficiary partners concerning other non-museum partners within the European project.

It can be seen that programs such as FP7 and H2020-EXCELLENT SCIENCE have involved a large number of museums as beneficiaries, suggesting that the call for proposals is aligned with the interests and needs of museums.

Figure 1: Participation of Museums as Beneficiary Partners in Projects Funded by Different EU Programs (2007-2022)



Source: Own elaboration (CORDIS data)

Table 2 shows the development of the participation of museums as beneficiary partners in consortia in the various categories of EU programs (H2020, HORIZON, CIP, FP6, FP7).

Table 2. Development Over Time of The Participation of Museums As Beneficiary Partners in Funded Projects, Broken Down By Funding Programs (2007-2022)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
CIP	0	0	0	3	19	40	7	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	79
FP6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
FP7	2	14	38	17	9	7	26	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	117
H2020-EURATOM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
H2020-EXCELLENT SCIENCE - ERC	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	6	0	0	11
H2020-EXCELLENT SCIENCE - FET	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H2020-EXCELLENT SCIENCE - MSCA	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	5	4	4	4	6	5	7	7	4	52
H2020-EXCELLENT SCIENCE - RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	1	3	18	6	0	0	39
H2020-INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	5	1	0	0	10
H2020-SCIENCE WITH AND FOR SOCIETY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	10
H2020-SECURE SOCIETIES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H2020-SOCIETAL CHALLENGES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	15	0	4	3	6	3	0	32

HORIZON - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - ERC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HORIZON - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - MSCA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
HORIZON - INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15
HORIZON - WIDENING PARTICIPATION	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	8	17	38	20	32	47	33	18	25	23	6	14	35	27	10	25	378

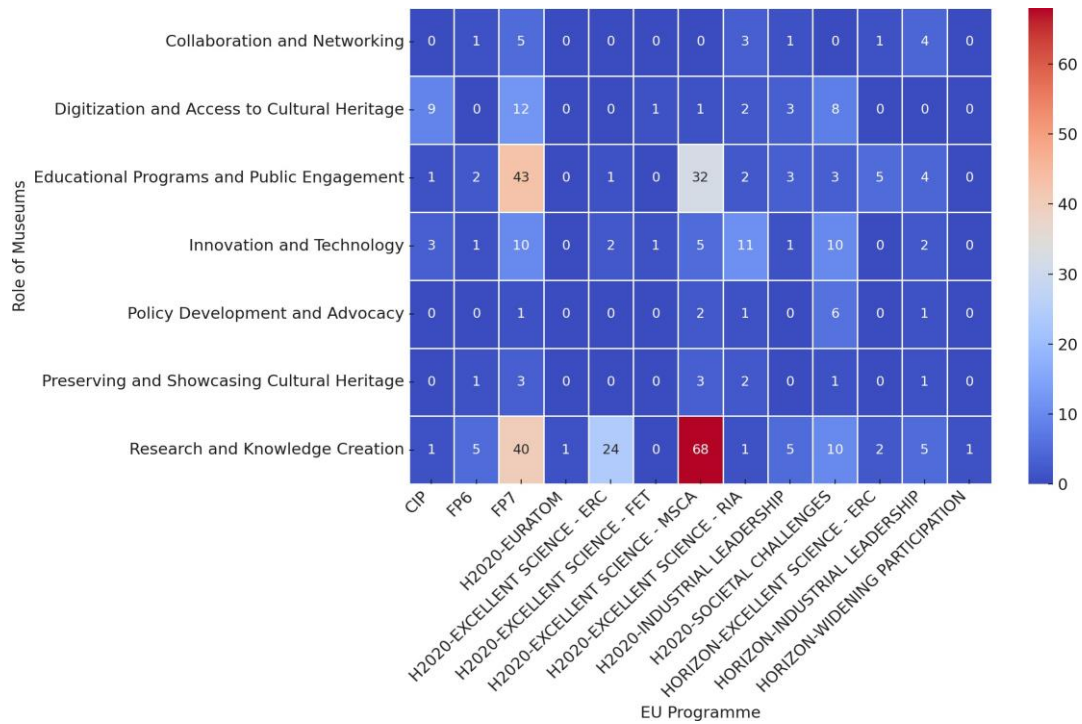
Source: Own elaboration (CORDIS data)

Over time, the number of museums involved in the programs has shown a fluctuating trend, with clearly defined phases of growth and decline. After a modest start, 2011 saw the first significant growth with 38 participating museums. In 2012, however, there was a sharp decline to just 20 museums, followed by a stable recovery in the following periods, culminating in a peak of 47 museums. Thereafter, the number stabilises at a high level but tends to decline gradually, with fluctuations between periods of decline and modest recoveries. The overall trend suggests that, despite some periods of decline, museum interest and participation have generally increased, with large peaks followed by fluctuations.

Another interesting aspect is the different roles that museums play in European projects. The most obvious difference lies in the degree of direct involvement and financial impact. As beneficiary partners, museums have more control over the activities and benefit directly from the funding. As associated partners, they play a more peripheral role but continue to have a significant impact, demonstrating that they can contribute beyond financial barriers.

A heat map was created showing the role of the beneficiary partner museums in relation to the EU programs.

It provides a visual representation of the distribution of the different roles of museums in the various EU programs. Each cell of the heat map corresponds to the frequency of a specific role within specific programs, while the color intensity indicates the number of occurrences.

Figure 2. Heatmap of Museum Roles in EU Programs (2007-2022)

Source: Own processing (CORDIS data)

The graph shows that the 'Seventh Framework Programs for Research and Technological Development (FP7)' and 'H2020 - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)' are the programs with the highest participation of museums, indicating that these initiatives have a strong focus on cultural and historical research collaborations.

We also note the low participation of museums in programs such as 'H2020 - Future and Emerging Technologies (FET)' and 'HORIZON EUROPE - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - European Research Council (ERC)', which could be due to the specialized and technical focus of these programs, in which cultural institutions such as museums are not usually involved. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that museums are not involved in the Horizon WIDENING programs

The analysis highlights the varying degrees of participation of museums in EU programs, reflecting the different objectives and purposes. These findings are valuable for cultural policy makers and managers in developing and implementing strategies to involve museums in European research and innovation endeavors.

European museums play diverse and influential roles in the projects and make a significant contribution to culture, education and research, regardless of their position as beneficiaries or associated partners. This versatility and adaptability emphasizes their crucial importance in today's cultural and educational landscape.

As beneficiary partners, museums play a central and active role in the projects. Museums are heavily involved in research and knowledge creation (43.1% of funded projects). And their role in scientific and cultural research, often in collaboration with academic institutions, has increased over the years. At the same time, they are equally involved in educational programs and public engagement (25% of funded projects). This role underlines the importance of museums as centers of learning and cultural interaction, promoting education and awareness of cultural heritage among the general public. Educational programs and public engagement show that museums continue to play a crucial role in cultural education and

promotion. This realization is significant because it shows how museums can extend their educational impact beyond their physical and financial boundaries.

Digitization and access to cultural heritage (9.5%) underline the commitment to modern preservation and democratization of access to cultural heritage. In addition, museums are actively involved in the development of technological innovations (12.2%) and the preservation of cultural heritage (2.9%). Less common, but no less important, are the roles of collaboration, networking and political advocacy, reflecting a commitment to intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and influence on cultural policy.

Conclusions

The data clearly show that museums are playing an increasingly dynamic role in European programs, with involvement going far beyond the traditional preservation of cultural heritage. Museums today are not only custodians of cultural treasures, but also important players in research, innovation and education. Their ability to produce and disseminate knowledge, together with their capacity to involve the public, illustrates a change that makes them a fundamental factor in Europe's cultural and scientific development.

The varying development of the number of museums involved may depend on several key factors. The availability of funding, often linked to specific calls for proposals, varies from year to year. Peaks in participation or declines may be related to more generous or less generous allocations. Programming cycles also play a role: European funding programs such as CIP, FP7 and H2020 follow multi-year cycles. The end of a cycle or delays in the publication of a new call also explains the decline in participation. Strategic and political priorities are another influencing factor: cultural policies change over time, and a period focusing on innovation and cultural development may favor an increase in the number of museums involved, while changing priorities may justify a decrease.

Finally, museum participation can also be influenced by special occasions: In some years, special calls or occasions have favoured greater participation, while in other years restrictions or stricter criteria may have limited participation.

These points to the need for further, more in-depth research. A better understanding of the economic, programmatic and political dynamics that influence museum participation requires more detailed analysis. The in-depth study of funding cycles, design strategies and cultural priorities could provide a clearer view of the observed fluctuations.

Some important considerations already emerge from this analysis. The potential of museums to contribute to digitization and universal access to cultural heritage will continue to grow, especially in a context where the use of technology is becoming increasingly central. At the same time, the challenge of sustainability, both environmental and cultural, represents an opportunity for museums to become promoters of positive change through projects that not only preserve the past but integrate it into a more responsible present and future.

Another crucial area for the future of museums concerns the training of museum staff. Based on the guidelines of international organizations such as ICOM (International Council of Museums) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), we can make some important reflections, in particular on the importance of continuous staff training to enable museums to meet challenges such as the digitalization, social inclusion and sustainability. Networks and international collaborations provide a valuable opportunity to share best practices and develop up-to-date skills. Through international training programs, museum staff can learn new management models, advanced technologies and innovative approaches to preserving and enhancing cultural heritage.

This exchange of best practices, promoted by international networks such as ICOM, strengthens the operational capacity of museums and encourages the creation of more inclusive and sustainable

management models. Sharing expertise not only improves staff skills, but also helps museums stay at the forefront of cultural heritage management in an ever-changing world.

Finally, international collaboration and networking can increase the impact of museums by promoting intercultural dialogue and enhancing their ability to contribute to research and innovation. This international role is crucial for addressing global challenges related to sustainability and the preservation of cultural heritage.

In summary, museums will play an increasingly central role in today's society, both as places of preservation and as hubs for knowledge, innovation and intercultural dialogue. It will be crucial to continue investing in projects that strengthen their ability to contribute to the global Sustainable Development Goals and promote broader and more inclusive access to culture. The training of operators, international collaborations and the introduction of innovative technologies will be the pillars on which the development of museums will be based in the near future.

Despite the increasing and diverse participation of museums in various European programs, participation in the Horizon WIDENING programs is still very low.

In this programs, which aims to strengthen the research and innovation capacities of European countries with a less developed scientific and technological capacity, museums are only involved to a limited extent. This could indicate a discrepancy between the objectives of Horizon WIDENING and the potential contribution that museums can make in the field of cultural research and innovation.

The exclusion of museums raises important questions for the future of the sector. On the one hand, it could reflect the perception that museums are not seen as key players in the context of developing technological and scientific competences. On the other hand, it could indicate that museums, despite their expertise in the field of preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage, are not yet fully integrated into the cooperation and design mechanisms related to the major European innovation programs.

However, this lack also represents an opportunity. Greater involvement of museums in programs such as Horizon WIDENING could not only enhance cultural resources in less represented regions, but also promote new synergies between science, technology and culture. Museums, with their wealth of knowledge and experience in the field of cultural preservation and dissemination, could become strategic partners for projects aimed at narrowing the gap between different regions of Europe in terms of research and innovation.

For the future, it would be appropriate to rethink the role of museums within Horizon WIDENING and encourage their greater involvement in international co-operation and scientific capacity building. This would allow museums to actively contribute to an innovation network that includes not only technological development but also the preservation and valorization of cultural heritage, especially in areas that are less involved in European projects. As this study shows, the European Union (EU) offers funding programs in which museums are mentioned and in which they end up actively participating. These funding opportunities support initiatives in the areas of cultural preservation, digitization, exhibition development, research and education programs, to name but a few.

Overall, European projects offer museums a unique opportunity to collaborate, innovate and promote cultural heritage at a European level. These initiatives facilitate the exchange of ideas, resources and expertise and promote a stronger and better-connected cultural landscape in Europe

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