

THE RISE OF THE ECONOMIC PARADIGM IN THE ACTIVITY OF MUSEUMS

Maria MOLDOVEANU¹

Abstract: *This article analyzes the two dominant concepts in the mentality and practices of museums: one refers to the tendency to design and evaluate the activity of the institution exclusively in terms of the museistic, aesthetic, scientific, etc. quality and of the basic reference points of the profession; the second consist in assuming a competitive, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented, customer-oriented vision, a vision oriented towards practices of performance measurement in economic terms. These views are also visible in the theoretician's views. Some appreciate that, as elements of cultural, local identity, museums must be protected against "commercial interests"— other authors consider that as public funds diminish, museums should also focus on their own revenues, on the feedback from the public and experts. In general, they believe that we are witnessing a rise in the logic of profit in the activity of museums, which implies a harmonization of the two existing tendencies.*

Keywords: *museum, performance, evaluation, efficiency, economic paradigm.*

JEL Classification: *A1; H32; H54; M2; M3; O18*

1. About mobile cultural heritage

The national cultural heritage includes "cultural items of exceptional value for humanity" (i.e. Cultural heritage thesaurus) and cultural items of special value for Romania (i.e. The Mobile Cultural Heritage Fund), items that have significant implications for the ecosystem of national cultural heritage.

Mobile cultural items registered in our country have *historical and archaeological* importance/value (e.g., manuscripts, maps, incunabula,

¹ The National Institute for Economic Research, The Romanian Center for Comparative Economics and Consensus, email: mmoldoveanu39@gmail.com

inscriptions, seals, coins, fragments of historical monuments, flags), *scientific and technical* importance / value (e.g., mineralogical collections, unique technical creations, popular technique), *artistic* – Plastic Art or decorative importance/value (e.g., painting, drawings, engravings), *religious* importance/value (e.g., icons), special *ethnographic* value (e.g., ceramics, ornaments, tapestries, traditional garments), as well as *numismatic, heraldic, philatelic, cartographic, bibliophile, economic, social*, and other value.

All these assets are material testimonies of the existence of human communities on a given territory, but also testimonies of their creative capacity and their contribution to the culture and civilization of the world.

According to the evaluation of CRCFC (*the Centre for Research and Consultancy in the Field of Culture*) specialists, the share of goods classified in the Romanian Mobile Heritage Fund depending on the field and registered number is as follows:

No.	Field	No. of items
1	Archaeology	7 344
2	Ethnography	6 332
3	Numismatics	6 194
4	Natural Sciences	5 816
5	Plastic Art	4 185
6	Decorative Art	2 395
7	History	1 739
8	Documents	1 307
9	Medals	775
10	Old books and manuscripts	741
11	Science and Technology	468

In our country, the most important holder of mobile cultural objects classified and to be classified is the public sector, mainly museums, archives, special collections, libraries, followed by places of worship, collectors, etc.

These holders are responsible for the protection of the heritage, according to the legal criteria, and for the activities under these functions, namely:

- identifying objects;
- studying them;
- inventory taking;
- *classification*;
- preservation;

- ensuring security;
- maintenance;
- restoration;
- valorization (setting off to advantage).

Classification is the main activity subjacent to *the protection function*, and *preservation, maintenance and restoration of heritage objects* are decisive activities for their transmission to future generations.

The accomplishment of these functions and activities requires competent, motivated human resources, interested in stimulating purchases, preserving and valorizing them on the cultural market.

The experts who drafted the National Culture and Heritage Strategy (2014-2020) noticed insufficient skills in identifying and evaluating mobile cultural items, but also the outdated technical character of equipment required to digitize specific activities of the institutions holding mobile cultural heritage. Equally, it was noted the low volume of the *classifications* of items likely to be included in the National Cultural Fund, as well as *the reduced volume of museum purchases*, as a result of "a substantial reduction in budgetary allocations", in the conditions of a decrease in their own collections due to the retrocessions, destruction, theft, other aggressions exerted on them.

Museums are defined by law as "public cultural institutions in the service of society, which acquire, safeguard, research, restore, communicate and exhibit, for purposes of study, education, and enjoyment, material and spiritual evidence of the human communities existence and evolution..." (Law no. 311/2003). Whether museums of art, archeology and history, natural history, science and technology, ethnography and anthropology, whether general or specialized, these institutions, like other cultural patrimony holders, must assume strategic objectives of *enriching collections*, ensure conditions for storage, preservation, restoration, protection of classified items, appreciate them and maximize their value by implicitly achieving qualitative and economic performance.

For this, the museum must become a "modern museum" connected to the aspirational perceptions of the community, it must innovate continuously and generate artistic surprises centered on the creative dimension of cultural heritage.

At the "Museum Night", the 2017 edition, "The National Network of Romanian Museums" (NNRM) launched a complex and, in many ways, atypical curatorial project.

Participants from our country – curators, architects, creative persons, designers, specialists in museography, "urban legends seekers", along with prestigious guests from museums around the world are invited to create the concept and imagery of an exhibition of various types of housing in the past 70 years, an exhibition that precedes the establishment of a "continually transforming museum", unique in Europe.

The "Moving-Museum" project essentially gives rise to the dialogue between the "museum that exposes for the public and the museum that exposes through public contribution". Depending on the interests of the museum public, the museum can change its concept (and identity), moving from one theme to another (e.g., from a "museum of fishing gear" to a "museum of Peruvian arts", etc.), from one destination to another, from the Danube Delta – Romania to the edifices on the banks of the Seine, while creative persons will have a "support space" for their own ideas, their own artistic or IT creations inspired by the exhibitions presented. Besides, among the objectives of the project is that the museum – that is constantly transforming – turn into "a type of showroom for Romanian creation" and a space for the promotion of design, creators and services in the most developed technology area.

The explicit message of the project and its mission is "to learn together" how to look and interpret the objects and the world they are composing.

However, before the launch of this project and the creation of The National Network of Museums, there were museums connected to the innovative vision of the European trend and which, led by artists and other creative personalities, promoted a new conception, a new attitude, a new way of exhibiting objects likely to maximize the effectiveness of the museum and of the image. "The exposed objects enter into a harmonious interaction" – wrote the artist Horia Bernea, manager of The Romanian Peasant Museum, in years when the institution was awarded the EMYA award (European Museum of the Year Award). Beyond mere displaying of objects, beyond the obsession of their explanation, "relationships that are established between them are closer to music than we think," the artist says, generating "what we might call museological poetics", i.e. a new way of contemplating things, a new experience of knowing the world.

2. Acceptations of the notion of performance in the activity of museums

Of course, any cultural / museographic activity has an intrinsic value/ dimension, i.e. aesthetic, historical, scientific, ethnographic, anthropological, expressed in specific terms. However, the management of large museums includes in its assessments a number of economic indicators such as: number of visitors, the price of tickets, sums obtained from cultural activities carried out at the request of the public (e.g., groups of pupils), additional amounts generated by the number of tourists in the area or sales in hotels, cafes, souvenir shops, their own illustrated magazines, albums, publications. In this way, the economic effects of museum activity, including their contribution to local GDP, are highlighted.

In recent years, the economic paradigm has had a strong influence on the priorities of some museums as well as on the evaluation of the professional performance of human resources.

According to some authors (e.g., M. Abraham, D. Griffin), the rise of the profit paradigm "has gradually changed the mentality of the institutions", their conception on the budget and the spending of money – public institutions "should rather earn money than spend it," wrote D.J. Savoie in a study on public management – with the ultimate goal of "adopting a competitive, customer-focused entrepreneurial vision" (D. Osborne, T. Gaebler, 1992).

In the space of the great museums in the world, words like "efficiency", "client", "performance", "competition", "accounting" are already assumed in everyday vocabulary. In these conditions, *the number of visitors to museums*, including virtual museums, is an essential strategic goal for managers and other employees; whether museums of art or natural history, science or ethnography, specialized or generalist, museums, as institutions holding mobile cultural items, aim to value their collections, to become more attractive, more competitive, more useful for all segments of residents and tourists – expected to participate in this unique construction in the visual field: interaction with the universe of museum values through another way of receiving, "reading" and understanding cultural messages and symbols.

The main indicators used to evaluate the work of museums and public collections are:

1. *the number of museums and classified collections* depending on:

- *the content* of cultural / natural assets (i.e. the profile of the units);
 - *the size and importance* of heritage (i.e. national, regional, county, local);
 - *type of ownership* (state or private);
 - *the exhibition area* by types of museums and natural monuments²;
2. *number of cultural and natural assets* ³ registered in the heritage of museums and public collections at the end of each year;
 3. *the number of visitors* to museums and public collections recorded on an annual basis, with the percentage of increase over the previous year (e.g., individual visitors and organized groups);
 4. *access to cultural heritage* owned by museums and public collections depending on the type of ticket (e.g., full, reduced, free of charge at "Museum Night");
 5. *specific activities* carried out by museums and public collections (i.e. cultural programs, studies and researches, educational projects, thematic exhibitions, temporary exhibitions at headquarters or subsidiaries, travelling exhibitions, promotional and publicistic activities);
 6. *the number of museum / public collections employees* by levels of study, by professional profiles (e.g., specialists in museography, conservators, restorers, researchers, advertisers) etc.

In 2016, in our country, there were 443 museums and public collections, that's two more than in the previous year, given that some units were removed from the cultural circuit by closing on a temporary basis, and others have been opened for the public at large.

Of the 443 basic units, plus 318 branches and sections, 400 are museums, 6 monuments, 23 Botanical & Zoological Gardens, Aquariums, 14 nature reserves.

² *The exhibition area* (sqm) includes the surface of the basic units, warehouses, workrooms, other annexes of the museum or public collection.

³ *The cultural and natural assets* are goods of an exceptional value – historical, archaeological, ethnographic, artistic, documentary, scientific and technical, literary, cinematographic, numismatic, philatelic, heraldic, bibliophile, cartographic, epigraphic – specimens (plants and animals) from botanical gardens, zoos, aquariums and nature reserves.

According to the typology of the assets owned, the structure of the museum network in 2016 was:

No.	Type of units	Number of units
1	Art Museums	96
2	Museums of Archeology and History	58
3	Museums of Science and Natural History	11
4	Museums of Science and Technology	12
5	<i>Museums of Ethnography and Anthropology</i>	125
6	Specialized museums	28
7	General museums	17
8	Other museums (mixed)	53
9	Monuments	6
10	Botanical & Zoological Gardens, Aquariums	23
11	Nature reserves	14
	Total	443

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, *The activity of cultural and artistic units in 2016, 2017.*

According to the importance of cultural heritage, size and territorial coverage at the end of 2016, we see an increase of nine units compared to 2015 in the number of museums of local importance. In the same year, two new national museums were opened, while the number of special collections and museums of regional and county importance remained almost the same as in the previous year.

It should be recalled that in the Bucharest-Ilfov region there are 39.8% of the museums, sections and branches of museums of national importance, where about 50% of the national heritage assets are held.

As anticipated, given the objectives of museum managers and operators, in 2016 there was a significant increase in the number of goods acquired at the network level (649,000), especially in the Museums of Science and Natural History and in the Museums of Archaeology and History, while the decreases in art collections (approximately 8 thousand) are within the limits of known practices (deterioration, theft, illegal circulation, etc.).

The activities specific to museums, i.e. permanent / basic (1 656) and temporary (3 088) exhibitions organized at their headquarters, branches, other more or less traditional cultural spaces (e.g., "industrial derelictions" abandoned and redeveloped as exhibition spaces), and other activities

(educational, scientific, creative) included in various projects with wide social addressability attracted a large number of visitors.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (cited work), in 2016, their number increased by 8.8% (1 145 thousand persons) compared to 2015. Of the 14,197 thousand visitors – either individual or in organized groups – approximately 46% paid access tickets in full, the others benefiting from discounts (26.1%) and gratuitousness (23.6%), including at the "Museum Night" , an event where more than 600.5 thousand visitors were attracted mainly by the collections of the museums of History, Archaeology, Ethnography, Anthropology.

The number of visitors is a relevant indicator for assessing the institution's performance. Qualitative performance is measured in professional terms intrinsic to museum activity, likely to attract more consumers and satisfy their expectations, and economic performance is measured in terms of "commercial accounting," which implies having more "paying customers" and undertaking various income-centered actions (e.g., rental of locations, rental of art objects, shops with own products – albums, publications, etc.).

Both the specialized staff – specialists in museography, conservators, restorers, researchers, anthropologists (in total 3 683 persons, approximately 50% of all employees) –, and other network workers (advertisers, designers, administrative personnel, etc.), along with their managers (or trained by them) have in recent years assumed the pragmatic vision of engaging in attractive activities for all occupational and age segments.

The quality and value of cultural programs, the implementation of performance measurement practices represent *organizational targets*, including in terms of attracting economic resources.

According to some authors, *the achievement of the quality* of cultural services (i.e. museums), on the one hand, and the promotion of *financial logic*, on the other, seem to be contradictory objectives. In point of fact, promoting the economic paradigm in the conception and practice of cultural institutions contributes to the achievement of the assumed objectives. However, other authors have tried to include *financial judgment* and *quality requirements* in the same dimension, but the model developed by them, based on the example of a single museum, did not meet the practitioners' support because of the complexity of the cultural objectives.

Comparing the results of the activity with the established objectives means to discuss in *terms of organizational effectiveness*, namely, of effectiveness based on responsibility.

Recalling that *effectiveness* also means opportunity, efficiency, survival, development, and obtaining resources, etc., in the phrase *effectiveness based on responsibility*, responsibility has three dimensions:

- *responsibility for the (self) development of the institution*, which, according to the Polish Mateusz Lewandowski, means effective coordination, decisions based on complex analyses, cooperation between departments, motivation of staff, efficient communication, ability to obtain the necessary resources (material, knowledge, economic), inventiveness, ability to survive, image and notoriety;
- *responsibility for staff development*, aiming at team spirit, better interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, professional development through trainings, etc.;
- *responsibility towards the public and the local community*, i.e. ensuring the high quality of services provided to consumers, systematic participation in events, customer orientation.

These three dimensions of responsibility are also the main types of managerial innovation as they were understood by Polish managers in the public cultural institutions investigated in the early 2000s in connection with the results of managerial innovation implemented in these institutions (i.e. innovations related to strategic management, quality management, accountability).

Although the subjects had also partially reached financial targets, e.g. "the ability to obtain key resources" – financial, material and knowledge (since financial and material resources as well as knowledge of new technologies were insufficient), the study shows that – in the overall vision of management – economic efficiency was not a priority in the mentality of the institutions and their representatives. However, there were dominant ideas such as: innovation, audience, notoriety in the community, action in the general interest, desire to maximize personal satisfaction and consumer satisfaction.

All these are, in our opinion, prerequisites for the professional performance of the cultural staff and implicitly for the performance of museums.

Two cities, two museums, two mentalities

– case study –

Among the cultural institutions existing in urban areas, the museum and the theater – where they exist – have the best cultural visibility not only through the image of their premises or positioning in space, nor by bright posters or illuminated signs, but by all the social, artistic, axiological, educational, managerial, etc. elements received by the community.

Without having carried out a complex study on the institutional performance, we've set ourselves to make a comparison between two museums with the same profile (of art), of the same rank (county), located in two cities at similar distance from the capital.

Brasov Art Museum operates in a neo-baroque building, built after the design of the architect Moritz Wagner from Brasov. The museum has a national art gallery of approximately 4 315 works and it is its duty to manage the collection, to develop it, to promote it, to bring it to the attention of the public, including through its publications.

Over time, the staff of the museum organized many exhibitions to highlight representative moments in the history of the Romanian and Transylvanian art:

- about great personalities and places:*
 - Karl Hubner;*
 - Forgotten artists of Brasov;*
 - The artistic avant-garde;*
 - The Burzenland in the Romanian Art;*
- In order to highlight the museum heritage:*
 - Masters of Romanian painting – original heritage of museum collections;*
 - Graphics collection;*
 - German art from Transylvania found in the collections of Brasov;*
- exhibitions dedicated to universal modern art and great photographers of the twentieth century;*

- exhibitions with works of consecrated or new contemporary artists.

The public of Brasov noted the recent exhibition "The hourglass of My Time. In memoriam Marin Gherasim", an artist who, when our churches collapsed, symbolically rebuilt them on his canvas, confessing: "I paint so that people would not forget, so that my paintings would be a testimony of a process of becoming, a testimony of my aspiration to become a better man in spirit".

If we take into consideration the contents of the museum discourse, we notice "the literacy" of the museographers from Brasov, their ability to build exhibitions on novel, exciting themes from the collections of the institution which are, however, insufficient to fill in the lack of substantial landmarks for the communication of art.

Museographers are pleased with their works. Museum rules are respected. The context does not matter anymore. But what is an art exhibition without light, color, music, emotion, proportionality of the space where it is located?

Visitors are disappointed. Their set of values differs. Many of them have visited dozens of Art Museums. Brasov has a large number of tourists in all seasons. "We recently visited Brasov Art Museum – wrote a group of visitors in the guestbook. We've never thought that works of universal value can be exposed in an obsolete location, giving the impression of poverty (...).Does this institution have no one to fight for its good, and especially for those who venture to cross its threshold?"

Visitors do not come, money does not come ... To cover its running costs, the museum receives public funding. Insufficient. Where are the sponsors? Where are the businessmen? They cannot be convinced only by the intrinsic quality of the exhibitions.

Galati Art Museum bases its assessment of performance on the perceptions of third parties – visitors, experts, "professional colleagues". Without declaring that it focuses on quantitative performance, museum staff emphasizes competence, sets qualitative criteria – the joint strategy with the management of the institution is the production of special artistic quality in the context of museum events with a wide audience, capable of generating a large number of visitors, including "Museum Night". This event in Galati, held in May

of the current year, was based on an original concept with four author exhibitions, not to mention exhibitions including the sale of objects. As a matter of fact, the slogan that projects the image/personality of the unit is "a museum open to all."

Value attracts value, value generates involvement, so that Romanian and foreign artists (born in Romania) have donated more than 400 important works to the Galati museum.

The strategy of the museum is transparent, the public appreciates the quality of collections that contain invaluable artistic values, whether we refer to names like Th. Aman, Gh. Petraşcu, N. Tonitza, O. Băncilă, I. Ţuculescu, N. Grigorescu, Th. Pallady, C. Ressu etc., or to the collections of Decorative Art or graphics or works of the Romanian avant-garde, etc.

They are equally appreciated by art experts and critics who believe that the success of the museum's approach "makes the visitors return over and over again".

"The museum has a dynamic structure – said one of the experts – through the organization of exhibitions, of various events for the public (concerts, debates, showing movies on screen, scientific services, creative camps), events that promote the most vanguardist and meaningful orientations in contemporary art " (M. Tomozei Cocos).

The nature of museum activities is so complex and special that performance measurement involves both quality assessment and financial analysis practices.

The cultural objects belonging to the heritage of museums incorporate and represent a variety of functions, meanings, values (including economic values), so they must be perceived at the same time as symbolic entities and as assets (materials) likely to produce economic effects. For instance, the aesthetic or scientific quality of exhibitions in ethnographic museums, as well as the original artifacts transferred from rural areas represent advantages of cultural competitiveness and, in certain contexts, elements that can generate financial advantages.

The Museums of Ethnography and Anthropology are preferred by the public. In 2016, they ranked fourth in a hierarchy based on the number of visitors. Example:

No.	Types of museums	Number of visitors (thousands of persons) in 2016
1.	Museums of Archeology and History	3330.6
2	Art Museums	2663.3
3	Botanical & Zoological Gardens, aquariums	2619.2
4	Museums of Ethnography and Anthropology	1750.2
5	Specialized museums	763.7
6	Mixed museums	699.7
7	General museums	690.6
8	Museums of Science and Natural History	600.0
9	Nature reserves	576.5
10	Monuments	304.9
11	Museums of Science and Technology	198.2
	Total	14196.9

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, *The activity of cultural and artistic units in 2016*, Romania, 2017, p. 15.

On the occasion of the events organized in the "Museum Night" in 2016, the Museums of Ethnography were also among the first options of the public, especially due to the fact that exciting activities took place in their halls, artistic creations of great success were showed on the screen, craftsmen made demonstrations with products on the border between traditional peasant objects and modern design in specially designed areas, the managers of the institutions created memorable new contexts through musical background, color, experiments with the new technologies invading art, culture, education, etc. For example, the preferences for ethnographic museums of the participants in "Museum Night" (2016) were:

No.	Types of museums	Number of visitors (thousands of persons) n 2016
1	Museums of Archeology and History	143.4
2	Museums of Ethnography and Anthropology	101.9
3	Art Museums	93.6
4	Specialized museums	75.9
5	Museums of Science and Natural History	55.7
6	Mixed museums	39.6
7	Museums of Science and Technology	37.7
8	Botanical & Zoological Gardens, aquariums	26.3
9	General museums	25.8
10	Monuments	1.7
	Total	601.5

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, *The activity of cultural and artistic units in 2016*, Romania, 2017, p. 15.

In 2017, museums and other cultural institutions associated with the event in about 30 European countries opened their doors to the cultural public the same night (May 20-21). A large number of visitors "stormed" the over 3,000 museums and associated cultural institutions to (re)discover their history, collections, "stories", the exclusivities exposed, spoken or (re)experienced together. Museums of ethnography were among the museums visited.

In our country, The Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography in the center of Cluj-Napoca and "Romulus Vuia" Outdoor Ethnographic Park have impressed the public through the semantic and stylistic diversity of the exhibits and events organized on this occasion. As we have emphasized in a previous paper, the activities promoting cultural interference, the dialogue of arts, are becoming more and more popular in the museum space so that artistic imagery, architectural detail, painting, music and poetic metaphors can be simultaneously received, can generate a plus of intellectual emotion and attract a large number of visitors.

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