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Article

Does a Museum Facilitate Social Inclusion and Diversity by Accessing National and European Non-reimbursable Funds?

Abstract: Romania's investment in culture is very low compared to the budget allocated by other neighbouring European countries to the cultural sector. Against this background, museums in Romania are constantly seeking additional sources of funding for various cultural projects as part of their efforts to catch up with European trends and strengthen the museum's image as a social agent, facilitating social inclusion and diversity. In this sense, a significant source of extra-budgetary funding for museums is mainly national and European-funded projects. These follow several general principles, such as sustainability, diversity, and social inclusion. Other sources of funding, such as funding from large companies that have an inclusive culture for diverse groups of people, such as people with disabilities, are also important for museums.

Currently, museums are implementing several projects on different funding axes, such as research projects (e.g., Interreg), adult education (Erasmus +), volunteering, solidarity projects (European Solidarity Corps, ESC), and cultural diversity (Creative Europe program).

This article will be based on a dual approach, namely a comprehensive literature review and an analysis of AFCN funding sources from 2019–2023 and the Creative Europe funding axis. This research is extremely relevant because museums in Romania are increasingly active in project management and the absorption of non-reimbursable funds.

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1. Introduction

Romania's investment in culture is very low, compared to the budget allocated by other European neighbouring countries to the cultural sector (Eurostat, 2022), and public funds have long been limited to the basic activities of a museum, which are no longer enough. This can be

attributed to the fact that the role of the museum has changed in recent years, and the focus now tends to be on what a museum can do to become more involved in society through educational activities and other projects it implements (Zbucnea and Bira, 2020; Smith, 2014; Decker, 2015). Hence, modern museums must develop numerous types of programs to satisfy their new roles, and additional funding is therefore needed, as public funds are often limited to core activities such as preserving and presenting heritage, so new sources of funding must be identified and then accessed.

In this context, Surubaru (2020) discusses the impact that different European funding streams have on a country from a cultural point of view and assesses the impact of European aid on national and local development in Bulgaria and Romania. Specifically, in his paper, Surubaru (2020) states that one of the main benefits of European Union accession is the possibility to access and implement large amounts of funding. This contributes to development gaps.

Moreover, the EU's cultural policy, as stated on the official website, aims to be complementary to the cultural policies of the Member States. In other words, the EU focuses, through several funding axes, on providing financial support to Member States, thus acting as a promoter of cultural heritage and transnational cultural cooperation (European Parliament, 2020). In this regard, it is important to mention *Culture for People*, one of the priorities outlined in the European Agenda for Culture adopted in 2018 and implemented through the resolution of the EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026). The aforementioned priority translates into strengthening cultural participation and the role of culture in society.

Given all these changes and the need for museums to access extra-budgetary funds, the paper aims to observe how funding lines support a museum in fulfilling these new roles, as an activist and participatory museum.

2. Literature review

The latest definition, adopted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2022, is the most comprehensive and states that „A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible, and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.” The newest roles and functions of museums, as defined by ICOM, are activist museum, participatory museum, and sustainable museum, and the focus of this paper is on the activist museum concept.

Graham Black points out that audiences are increasingly unwilling to accept a passive role on the part of the museum, so changes in mindset have also brought with them several changes in museum functions (Black, 2021). Therefore, in today's society, a museum should not only be a provider of knowledge and responsible for preserving and promoting heritage but also a promoter of change, an authority that brings to the forefront and moves forward issues that are truly relevant to their communities and society at large through educational activities and exhibitions (Black, 2021). These topics can be climate change, migration policies, and social inequality, depending on the specifics of the museum (Janes and Sandell, 2019; Kavanagh, 2002; Zbucnea et al., 2020).

As mentioned above, in this context and taking into account the evolving functions of museums, the EU has developed many programs to support museums in fulfilling their role as promoters of change. Thus, there are a lot of papers that discuss the EU Youth Strategy (Gil-Lacruz et. al., 2016; Angermann and Sittermann, 2010; Klatt, 2020; Rozumniuk, 2021; Sipos, 2020), which are relevant to see the context and changes driving the need for such a funding axis. Sipos (2020) raises an extremely important question, namely whether this strategy and the European Youth Goals can contribute to solidarity in the youth field at both European and national levels and what this contribution looks like. As there is a funding axis dedicated to adult education, it is relevant to also review papers that discuss the need for staff development in the field of culture (Murphy, 2016; Dudzinska-Przesmitzki and Grenier, 2008; Bevan and Xanthoudaki, 2008; Tran, Gupta and Bader, 2019; Causey, 2011), and the impact of job shadowing in the cultural field. Moreover, it is relevant to say that voluntary projects, included in the European Solidarity Fund, bring young people closer to cultural and museum institutions, which are generally perceived as elitist places. In addition, Širca et. al. (2016) talk about volunteering as an active expression of civic participation and also as a vehicle for solidarity, and social inclusion, which strengthens common European values. This is important because the role of the museum has changed a lot and the museum should be a friendlier space and closer to people from different cultural and social backgrounds. Museums are becoming increasingly active, valuing cultural participation, because engaging communities (volunteers for example) gives them insights that help them to better play their role as social agent, highly active, vocal, and involved in societal issues. Concerning this, several papers address the importance of volunteers for a museum (Kartchner et. al, 2021; Goodlad and McIvor, 2005; Holmes, 2007; Păceșilă, 2020; Duursma et al., 2023; Lyons and Wearing, 2008; Edwards, 2007; Lithgow and Timbrell, 2014; Refvem et al., 2021). Although developed in a different cultural environment, V Factor, a program implemented by the Natural History Museum in London, offered volunteers the chance to work in public view alongside Museum scientists, transforming them from visitors to proactive volunteers (Miller et. al., 2013), demonstrating how important this community is.

However, museums not only have access to European or national funding but also funding from large companies that have an inclusive culture for different groups of people, such as people with disabilities, which is also important. Oliver (1999) talks about France's dynamic approach to private-sector partnerships, which brings major changes in the way museums see their role and functions, while Lund and Greyser (2015) argue that a partnership between two institutions, one being a company and the other one a museum, adds value to both in terms of interaction with customers and breadth of audiences, and Colbert et.al. (2005) also believe that sponsorships can be done to simply project an image of good corporate citizenship (the nature of the sponsorship being philanthropic).

Like many other scholars, Kampschulte and Hatcher (2021) see the museum as a place of social discourses, the most important of which go beyond the museum and take place with the communities formed around the cultural institution. This vision follows the new definition of the museum adopted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2022 and illustrates that collaboration is no longer optional but a necessity, as visitors want museums to be more representative. In this context, raising additional funds through cooperation with corporations is one of the ways museums engage in partnerships with institutions and academic fields that are outside the museum itself, showing openness and a desire to evolve beyond the outdated definition of the museum as a place where elites meet. Moreover, in terms of the companies

from which museums seek sponsorship, Romolini et. al. (2020) say that museum representatives should look in particular to large companies, which are more likely to link their brand to cultural activities.

In this respect, Tweedy (2009) makes a very important point, namely the need to constantly educate the general public and, more specifically, the business community about the value of museum sponsorship, both for society as a whole and for the „image” of the company involved, and Romolini et. al. (2020) also raises an important issue on the high level of museum dependency from donors. Another aspect that museums should be mindful of in obtaining corporate funding is their responsibility to the communities they represent, to their stakeholders, and to the general public to remain impartial and independent from the external and internal censorship that is often associated with profit-driven companies, because an association with a particular company also means a transfer of image for both parties involved (Proteau, 2018; Danilov, 1988).

In addition, we found a gap in the literature regarding the access and implementation of funds dedicated to volunteering in Europe. We attribute this lack to the fact that the National History Museum of Romania is the only museum that posts volunteering opportunities on the European Solidarity Corps page, being the only accredited institution that can receive volunteers and implement projects on ESC. As this paper focuses on museums in Romania, this section will include an overview of museums that have implemented Erasmus and ESC projects. The research conducted for this paper showed that so far only a few museums in Romania have implemented Erasmus projects, such as the National History Museum of Romania, Museum of Maps and Old Books, National Art Museum of Romania, National Museum Complex „Moldova”, Alexandru Stefulescu Gorj County Museum, Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography and Municipal Museum „Octavian Moşescu” Râmnicu Sărat.

3. European-funded projects

Most European-funded projects follow several general principles, such as sustainability, diversity, and social inclusion, so one of the assumptions that underlie this paper is that a museum facilitates social inclusion and diversity by accessing European non-reimbursable funds.

The European Union addresses multiple gaps, via different categories of funding axes. For example, through research projects, such as Interreg, the EU supports social and economic developments and it stimulates cooperation between regions on various levels. One issue is that although cultural and creative workers tend to be better educated and more skilled than the average worker, there are nevertheless persistent skills gaps in the sector (OECD, 2022). This is where Erasmus+ projects come in, responding to the need to improve skills in this sector. Erasmus+ is a funding axis dedicated to adult education and volunteering. By participating in this, adult learners and education staff can be involved in *participative learning*. Activities such as job shadowing, courses, and teaching or training assignments can be organised in another organisation abroad (European Commission, 2020), and this can help museums or cultural institutions in general to develop innovative and collaborative projects.

There are also solidarity projects (European Solidarity Corps or ESC), which aim to involve young Europeans in different cultural contexts to acquire skills that will enable them to integrate into the labour market. The institution that applies and implements such projects gives young people aged 18-30 the opportunity to interact with young people from other cul-

tural backgrounds, thus making them aware of what they have in common. In other words, it is a means of bringing young people together to exchange different values and overcome differences. The EU also addresses financial gaps in culture and places special emphasis on the notion of access to culture for diverse population groups, which implies a policy objective of removing barriers that prevent such access (Pasukowska-Schnass, 2017). One such project is Creative Europe (CE), launched by the European Commission in 2013, which continues the work started under the Culture Programme (2007-2013), which we will discuss in the following paragraphs.

There are a lot of papers regarding the development of the European policy towards culture (Primorac et al., 2017; Bruell, 2013), and the impact of Creative Europe (Schlesinger, 2015; Potschka et al., 2013) but also papers that discuss the future of the program (Bamford and Wimmer, 2012). In this sense, Vos (2022) examines how the program should work in South-east Europe, more specifically in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia, arguing that this expansion is a great way of reconnecting with the larger European community.

Creative Europe is the European Union's framework program that supports the cultural sectors and creative sectors. In 2014, it brought together three programs (MEDIA, Culture, and MEDIA Mundus) to create a single comprehensive instrument (European Commission, 2018).

Between 2014 and 2020, the Creative Europe Program funded a total of 645 European cultural cooperation projects, of which 94 involve 69 Romanian organizations, of which 6 are project leaders. In addition, of the total number of selected cooperation projects, 14% have at least one partner from Romania, and 6 Romanian organizations are involved in 8 cooperation projects as project leaders. In other words, these quantitative results show that there is a willingness from Romanian organizations to get involved, but there is still a low level of involvement in the cultural sector for this type of project. We also note that a large proportion of the cultural projects on this axis are as partners, so Romania, if and when it gets involved in such projects, does so from the position of partner, rarely assuming a management position – project leader.

Not only is the proportion of cultural organizations in Romania involved in cooperation projects generally low, but also the proportion of museums. Thus, the museum sector is not dynamic from this point of view, given that in the period 2014-2020, within the Culture sub-program, only 4 projects proposed by Romanian museums were selected and subsequently implemented (European Commission, 2018). This can be attributed to several causes: responsible staff in museums are not informed by the Ministry of Culture about these opportunities, the staff is not qualified and cannot implement such projects, and is not dynamic enough.

In addition, compared to countries such as France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, which are leaders in terms of the number of projects submitted and funded in the category of smaller-scale cooperation (COOP 1), Romania ranks 19th out of 42 countries participating in the program (Creative Europe, 2022). The case studies carried out by the Creative Europe Romania Office in 2018 show that the projects contribute to diversifying the cultural offer, both at the local and also at the national level, attracting new audiences and the collaboration between several institutions has led to discussions and debates around key themes and aspects of the project (Creative Europe, 2022).

In the early years of the implementation of EU funding, questions were raised about the effective use of EU funds and the impact they could have on national and local developments.

So, in what follows, we will analyse in detail the 4 projects implemented by museums in Romania between 2014 and 2020.

The leader of the first cultural project „Cu Tenda – Stories, Images and Sounds on the Move [Living Memory of Southeastern Europe]” is the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Through this project, the museum aimed to explore the identity and cultural history of several ethnic groups of South Eastern Europe: Aromanians (Vlachs), Karacatsans (Sarakaceans), and communities from the Mito Region of Southern Italy. The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant is assuming through this project the role of an activist museum because one of the objectives of the cultural project is to raise awareness of the cultural heritage of peoples lesser known on the European level or insufficiently evoked in narratives (Cu Tenda, 2015). Moreover, according to the information available on the project website, the project challenged people to have interactive discussions, creating the ideal framework for inclusive dialogue within these communities, where all of them felt that their opinions and stories mattered. During the 4 years of implementation of the project, all 4 partners did activities such as itinerant exhibitions, intercultural workshops/ sessions, theatre performance, and interactive exchange visits in 4 countries (Cu Tenda, 2015).

Iron Gates Museum (Drobeta-Turnu Severin) was a partner in the collaborative project „Journey to the Beginnings”, which aimed to bring the public closer to archaeology, contemporary art, and new technologies. At the heart of the project was the desire to develop a new interpretive infrastructure for heritage, specifically the prehistoric sites involved, their museums, and archaeological parks, using cultural heritage as a source of inspiration for contemporary arts and new technologies (Journey to the Beginnings, 2015). This cross-sectoral collaboration between archaeologists, museum professionals, contemporary artists, and IT experts resulted in live performances and a complex Augmented and Virtual Reality application (Journey to the Beginnings, 2015).

Câmpulung Municipal Museum was a partner in 2 projects: „ARTEC – Arts, Rediscovery, Traditions, Eclectic, Contemporary” and „DARTS – Digital Art and Storytelling for Heritage Audience Development”. ARTEC focuses, among other things, on creativity and art as tools for preserving and strengthening the European identity represented by heritage. In the framework of this project, a series of activities combined arts and crafts as interdisciplinary action, such as launching an Arts and Crafts Centre in a historic monument, and workshops for schoolchildren, debates, and guided tours. One of the target groups was a regionally less advantaged group, thus widening the general audience. The DARTS project included two international competitions in digital art and storytelling, to involve young Europeans in experimenting with new ways of increasing the attractiveness of built heritage, the institution on behalf of the Romanian partner being the Corvinilor Castle in Hunedoara, Romania (Muzeul Câmpulung, 2015).

Table 1. Main European funding sources accessible to museums

Funding axis	Description
Interreg	Cooperation and research program
Creative Europe	Cooperation and research program
Erasmus +	Courses and job shadowing mobilities
European Solidarity Corps	Volunteering projects

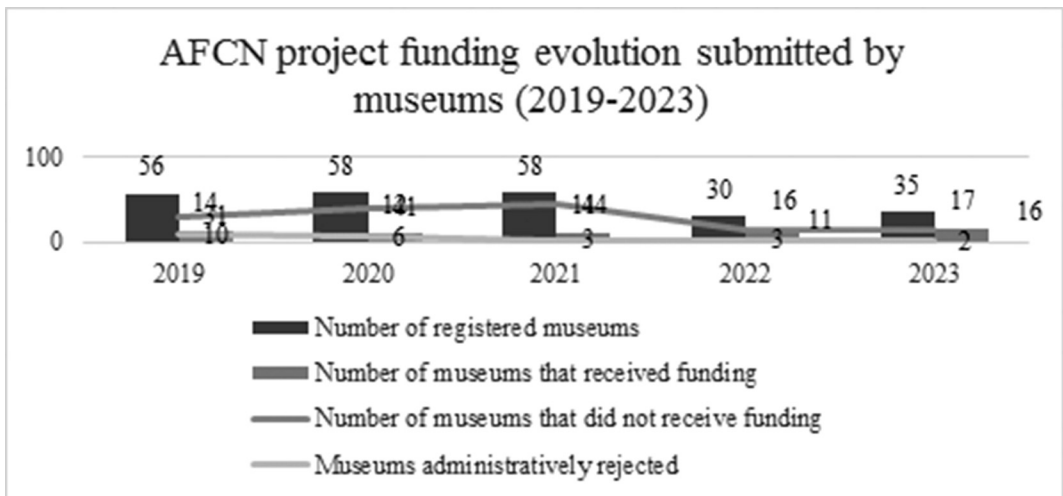
4. National-funded projects

Cultural heritage is also financed from internal sources, and the internal public sources are the Ministry of Culture (through the Administration of the National Cultural Fund) and the local public administration, which are the main funders (Zbucea, 2008). However, there is a gap in the literature on how to access them and their impact on the cultural environment.

The National Cultural Fund Administration (AFCN) supports the development and implementation of cultural projects. One of the priorities is the widest possible access to culture for all categories of the public, as well as the identification and activation of new audiences, thus leading to a higher degree of civic participation (AFCN). Moreover, according to the AFCN mission, culture is a sustainable development and social cohesion factor. It is important to mention that the projects can be submitted in several thematic areas, established for each session (in total there are 3 sessions, one of which is exclusively dedicated to editorial projects) by the National Cultural Fund Administration Council.

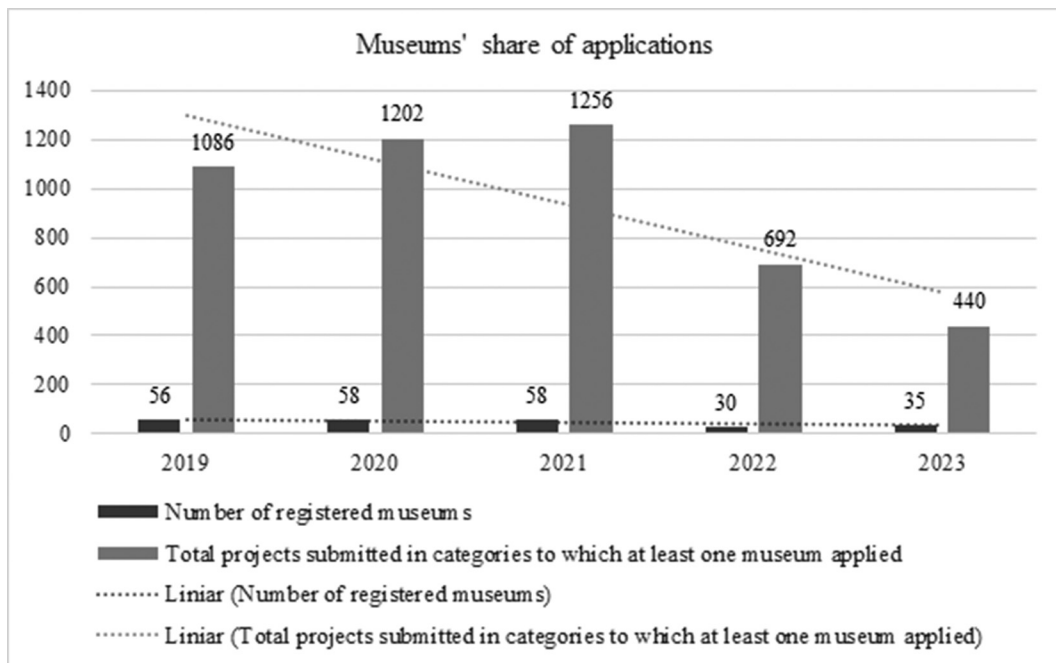
One category of beneficiaries of these grants is museums. In this regard, following the analysis of the results from 2019-2023, the funding areas to which museums applied most were visual arts, education through culture, cultural intervention, tangible cultural heritage, and intangible cultural heritage. The number of museums submitting projects in the first three years is slightly increasing and then constant, and in 2022 there is a decrease in the number of projects submitted by museums, but the funding rate of projects submitted by museums is increasing. Therefore, the data indicates an increase in project writing skills and a better identification of the needs of the institution represented. Also, the number of projects submitted by museums that are administratively rejected indicates a better understanding of the funding process. Therefore, the projects are more qualitative.

Figure 1. AFCN project funding evolution submitted by museums (2019-2023)



Another point indicated by the data is the overall low number of projects submitted by museums in Romania compared to other institutions in the categories to which at least one museum applied. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the low number of projects submitted in 2022 is also observed at a general level.

Figure 2. Museums' share of applications (2019-2023)



While the literature review indicates a need for museums to be increasingly dynamic, the analysis of AFCN results from 2019-2023 indicates that museums are still applying to categories that relate to their „core“ mission.

5. Conclusions

The European Commission has a coherent funding program to support museums and increase collaboration between cultural institutions, while at the same time providing all the necessary tools to reach new audiences so that every category of person feels included in the cultural projects that are being developed. National funds are also an alternative for museums in Romania, which are constantly looking for additional sources of funding for various cultural projects, as part of their efforts to align with European trends and strengthen the image of the museum as a social agent, facilitating social inclusion and diversity. Although there has been progress in accessing external or internal public funding, still not many museums submit projects, either due to a lack of qualified staff or lack of resources to complete the project. This is a limitation of this paper, as it fails to reach out to people in museums in Romania to find out exactly what the reasons are for not accessing funds.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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