Tinatin Baghashvili

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES IN THE MUSEUMS OF GEORGIA

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Vienna

March 2023

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PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES IN THE MUSEUMS OF GEORGIA

by

Tinatin Baghashvili

(Georgia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, Tinatin Baghashvili, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research, and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

Museums are social spaces that collect, preserve, and exhibit heritage. Public participation and engagement are one of the sources of value of the museum function. The thesis examines the participation practices in the museum sector in Georgia and presents an analysis of the influence of the participation process. It provides an overview of the historical and policy context, examines international practices, and highlights the need to strengthen public participation in Georgian museums. Interviews with museum executives and professionals and an online survey of the public justify the need to promote the training of museum staff on participation. The results of an in-depth study of two museums from Georgian regions are presented to elucidate the needs and opportunities for participatory practices in small museums.

The thesis explores how the historical context and national and international policies influence participatory practices in Georgia. It sheds light on the benefits of public engagement and how it affects the overall development of the museum sector by examining participatory practices, tools, and international practices of participation in museums.

The analysis of the policies and practices demonstrates that there is a need to encourage museum professionals to transform museums into more participatory organizations. The thesis presents a training module aimed at raising museum staff awareness of the importance of public participation and engagement, developing relevant skills, and integrating them into museum practice.

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I would also like to thank the interviewees and survey participants who gave their time to support my project. I also appreciate their hospitality and courtesy during the study tours to the Museum of Niko Pirosmani in Mirzaani and the Museum of Religion in Batumi. All these activities and processes helped me to shape my work and I am grateful for them.

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List of Abbreviations

ICOM – International Council of Museums

OMC – the European Union Report on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage

GMA – Georgian Museum Association (GMA)

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ICOMOS – International Council of Monuments and Sites

NGO – Nongovernmental organization

NEMO – Network of European Museums Organizations

MUSA – Museum Sector Alliance

ACED – Audience-Centered Experience Design

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Introduction

Museums are cultural heritage institutions that preserve the remains of the past in the present for the benefit of the future. According to the recent museum definition announced on 24th of August 2022 by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), "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."[1] Museums operate at multiple levels that require a sustainable approach to organizational management. Museum management faces the challenge of being a multifunctional social and inclusive space, though this is a relatively new requirement. Historically, museums have been elitist institutions. It is a challenge for old museums with a long tradition of being inclusive because their buildings were not originally built as open spaces, or the organizational structures were not designed that way. The new definition of "museum" emphasizes the importance of public participation and accessibility. The recognition of this approach is undisputed, but few museums implement it effectively.

This thesis outlines the extent to which museums in Georgia have adopted the new concepts of the museum, their top-down management style, and their difficulties in introducing innovative approaches to organizational management. The current model is a legacy from the Soviet era and is characterized by a top-down management system that lacks transparency and commitment. The post-Soviet museums, where permanent exhibitions were assembled in the mid-twentieth century,

[1] ICOM Advisory Council, "Museum Definition," August 24, 2022, https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/.

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present narratives, and interpretations according to Soviet ideology are still on display today.[2] Today's visitors have different needs and expectations, and the “traditional” methods of museum operation are no longer popular in the public. Therefore, I contend that failure to consider organizational management approaches affects museum presentation and meaningful visitor engagement; thus, I would like to examine visitor engagement and visitation in museums.

To contextualize the research, I will examine what organizational management means in a museum and how it relates to museum operations. I will explore the definitions of public participation and why it has become so important in Western museums. This will help in exploring how Georgian museums can benefit from foreign experiences. I will explore the integration of innovative approaches into Georgian museum management and their role in resilience, particularly how state museums can be transformed into attractive destinations by offering visitors diverse and meaningful experiences. In conclusion, I will examine the obstacles, hesitation to apply, and results of poorly adopted and advocated participatory practices in the daily work of the museum.

On 24th of August 2022 for the first time in 15 years, ICOM made recommendations and establishes standards around the world, has updated its definition of the word "museum." After years of debate about how ideological the definition should be, the final text includes new language about museums being ethical, diverse, accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.[3] While the new standard mimics the earlier structure of the definition, it incorporates progressive concepts such as "diversity," "sustainability," and "accessibility"- terms meant to reflect recent debates about the

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[2] Datunashvili, Alisa. et al., “Knowledge Management in the Post-Soviet Museums: Challenges of Digital Data Base Implementation in the Georgian National Museum,” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences*, 12, no. 2, 2018, http://science.org.ge/bnas/t12-n2/32_Datunashvili.pdf.

[3] Ables, Kesley. “What Is a ‘Museum’? A Revised Definition Looks Forward, Not Back.", *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2022/08/27/international-council-of-museums-redefines-museum/.

civic role of museums.[4] ICOM's definition of the museum from 2019 also focuses on the trends of inclusivity and opening the museum to a wider audience.[5] As museums shift their traditional systems to more interactive ones, they have become platforms for dialogue. The added value that the participatory process creates for museums can have a positive impact on the community by creating a space for social engagement, interaction, personal growth, education.[6]

Participation can be understood in different ways: Audience, i.e., consumer of the museum and its services, participation in museum funding as museum friend, volunteer, or source, participation in museum governance, etc. This thesis will focus only on a general understanding of participatory practice as one of the core values of museum operations.

To test my hypothesis that organizational management approaches miss audience participation and engagement, I would like to examine the way museums operate in Georgia. Drawing on research and case studies, I aim to identify how Georgian museums promote participation. Accordingly, I will identify the aspects to be developed and provide a training module to improve the situation for museum practitioners as a practical guide for promoting public participation in museums.

Some progress has been made in the museum sector in Georgia, but the management of state museums remains complex and difficult. The operational system of the museum sector is entrenched, and any change seems to be a challenge for the state and sector representatives. State funding for museums is inadequate, and museums lack the legal flexibility to run their own

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[4] Villa, Angelica. "Industry Group Adds the Word 'Diversity' to Its Definition of Museums—But Some Say It's Not Enough," *Art News*, August 26, 2022, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/international-council-revises-definition-museum-1234637556/.

[5] Adams, Geraldine Kendall. "ICOM Unveils New Museum Definition", *Museum Association*, July 31, 2019, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2019/07/31072019-icom-reveals-updated-museum-definition/#.

[6] Simon, Nina. "Opening up the Museum: Nina Simon @ TEDx Santacruz, video presentation", TEDx Talks. Filmed on September 15, 2012 (at the Cabrillo College Crocker Theatre in Aptos, CA (Santa Cruz County) U.S., video, 15:30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIcwIH1vZ9w.

businesses and generate revenue. This is closely related to government policies aimed at allowing legal entities to operate independently and strengthening constructive cooperation between governments. A large turnout has an impact on the museum's revenue situation. Frequent visits and the use of various services can generate revenue for the museum, and the process can be controlled by the museum management. Therefore, citizen participation, governance, and funding of the museum sector are closely linked.

At the same time, the Georgian government has adopted several policy documents that encourage and support museum development. Despite these efforts, museum management and leadership often struggle to develop effective administration. Moreover, they sometimes encounter resistance from other staff members who do not share the enthusiasm for the participatory approach.

The museum management sees the solution in professional development and tries to train the staff. ICOM Georgia regularly holds various human resource development (HR) and museum staff training events. According to Lana Karaia, the current head of ICOM Georgia, local representatives have been working hard since 2007 to implement various international capacity-building programs for museum staff to develop their professional skills.[7] Nevertheless, further action is needed at the state and political levels, as well as in the private sector, to establish participatory mechanisms in cultural heritage organizations.

Museums operating in Georgia do not encourage public participation. Museum infrastructure, capacity, and facilities are often in poor condition. Most facilities are not easily accessible, and many buildings need renovation: some museums do not have adequate heating and lighting; there are no security alarms and no special entrances for the disabled, no audio guidance, and so on.[8] In

[7] Karaia, Lana. ICOM Georgia Head Office, Interview on Museum Sector in Georgia, Zoom, November 29, 2021.
[8] Sanadiradze, Nini. Director of Tbilisi Museum Union, Interview on Museum Management Issues in Georgia, Zoom, October 8, 2021.

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recent years, there has been a positive development. According to the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU, cultural facilities should meet the needs and be renewed or rebuilt, and some measures have already been taken to improve the situation. Moreover, the improvements give hope that participation can be accelerated. In addition, museum management has taken an interest in the development of the public and its participation in museum life.[9]

In addition to the challenges related to infrastructural development, museum management often fails to open museum spaces so that they become participatory, innovative, and social. From my perspective, museums face the challenge of opening up, and they have tremendous opportunities for improvement to increase awareness of their educational and social role in society and meaningful audience engagement. This closed operation also leads to a lack of statistics and research related to the museum sector. Involvement in creating open, social, educational, and multi-functional spaces is a new and unexplored approach to the Georgian museum management. These challenges can be beneficial as they create opportunities to develop, modernize and popularize the museum sector among Georgian audiences. The MA Thesis contributes to the overall situation, provides research in the field, and raises awareness of opportunities for participation and development of the sector.

To systematically examine the above challenges and their discussion in the Georgian museum sector, I will focus on two cases: the Museum of Niko Pirosmani (Mirzaani) and the Museum of Religion of Batumi. The purpose of selecting the case studies was to present the small and state-funded museums in rural areas. These museums are usually not the first choice for visitors, although they have the potential to attract people and act as cultural ambassadors by creating social

[9] EU, "Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and Their Member States, of the One Part, and Georgia, of the Other Part", *Official Journal of the European Union*, August 30, 2014, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(02).

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spaces in the museum to encourage public participation. Therefore, studying small and regional museums can highlight the challenges of participation in the museum sector as a whole and identify opportunities for its integration. In addition, the training module can be practiced first in smaller museums and later elaborated and tested in other museums.

This thesis was written during the Covid pandemic, and all museums had to cope with the new challenges, including the ban on operating physical spaces and the lack of social gatherings and events. Many well-known museums have moved to online mode, offering online events and exhibitions. Meanwhile, in Georgia, none of the museums had a full online presence. They were closed most of the time. The pandemic highlighted the importance of museums not only as cultural heritage organizations but also as platforms for social encounters, and the importance of involving the public in the organization's daily life. It also showed that museum management must adapt frequently and flexibly to the new reality to sustain museums in the long term.

Museums sometimes struggle to engage young audiences, which can be easily achieved by using digital technologies and encouraging audience participation. For all audiences, the sense of engagement and co-creation can be a driver to create social value. This approach is also used in education, and digital technologies are becoming more common and widely used. However, social interactions create different experiences that stimulate social sharing and growth, while the co-creating value in the digital space can take longer but does not have the same impact.[10]

Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Georgian museums can facilitate participation and public engagement. It answers the following questions:

[10] Marini, Camilla. Agostino, Deborah. Simoni, Loretta. "Co-Creating History: The Case of Worthy as a Virtual Collaborative Museum," *Journal of Museum Education* 47, no. 2, August 25, 2022, 385-394, https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2022.2076777.

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1. How does the historical context affect participatory practices in Georgia?
2. How do national and international policies support participation in museums and how participatory are museums in Georgia?
3. What are the benefits of public involvement in museum development and how can it be implemented in the Georgian context?
4. How can museums in Georgia learn from and adapt good international practices in participation?
5. How can museums in Georgia facilitate participation practices?

Literature Review

There are no specific publications on participation in Georgian museums. However, there are a considerable number of publications based on cases from other countries and theoretical studies. This literature review provides a general overview of the materials that benefit this MA thesis.

Participation has recently become a popular term in the museum field. ICOM's most recent definition clearly emphasizes the value of public engagement in museum organizations, and the journal Museum Management and Curatorship explores participation at various levels and offers related articles. "Participation in Museum Work" by Line Vestergaard Knudsen explores how the relationships between process and product (e.g., digital tool or exhibition) reveal the contributions of a participatory process. Nina Simon's book Participatory Museum also opens new horizons for understanding communication between the museum and visitors. Recently, the notion of co-creation has become popular, and Nina Simon shows how to involve the audience in museum work so that they become co-creators of the process. In addition to co-creation theories, Lynch Bernadette's book "Whose Cake Is It Anyway?" also explores the approach of "thinking out of the box" and presents engagement and collaborative participation in 12 galleries and museums in the UK.

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When we talk about participation, we usually refer to physical presence, but in the modern world, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, online access and engagement have become key issues for museums. In his book Museums and the Challenge of Change, Graham Black explores the profound challenges facing museums and identifies ways forward based on partnership with audiences and communities on the ground, online, and in broader society. He explores the changing needs of audiences and the need for change in museums. The same approach is used in the article "Rethinking Interactivity: Designing for Participation in Museums and Galleries" by Dirk Vom Lehn. The author explores the interaction between technologies in exhibitions and the audience. He argues that novelty and technologies sometimes promote engagement and create sensory experiences for the audience.

This thesis analyzes the publications of the former president of ICOM Georgia, Inga Karaia, on the historical context of the institutionalization of museums in Georgia; it also analyzes policy documents related to participation practices in cultural heritage organizations. This includes historical events that favored the establishment and institutionalization of museums, as well as the relevant policy documents that influence the operation and development of the sector. The MA Thesis aims to understand what policy mechanisms can develop public participation. It also focuses on Nina Simon's models of participation and explores participation practices.

There are some professional training programs on participatory approaches for museums that provide a good foundation for toolkit preparation. The MA thesis will explore some of them. One of the major online platforms serving the museum sector is Museum Next. The organization deals with communication strategies and different approaches for different audiences. It focuses on cultural organizations and also publishes articles related to museums. The website is full of interesting resources. Jasper Wisser and Jim Richardson have published strategic mechanisms for

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museum engagement. Tim Deakin describes how to build the relationship between museums and the public in his article "Understanding the essential role of progressive social engagement in successful audience development." He emphasizes that museums have the power to be heard and listened to, and therefore can be used as platforms for conversation.

The Thesis will analyze ACED model for participation in the framework of the project ADESTE +, NEMO training courses for audience development, ICOM capacity-building opportunities, etc.

Methods of Research and Sources

To answer the research questions, I will use a variety of methods, including analysis of policy documents and historical analysis, as well as a literature review on public engagement and participation. Additionally, I conducted two study tours, an online survey with 91 respondents (out of up to 100) and 6 interviews with representatives from the museum and cultural sectors in Georgia.

The online survey, conducted in Georgian, aimed to create an understanding of the management and operation of Georgia's museum sector. It took the form of a Google questionnaire and was distributed via social media, including Facebook, the organization's newsletter, Instagram, and private correspondence. Anyone could fill it in. All respondents were Georgian citizens between the ages of 18 and 65. The background of the respondents was broad and included professionals from the creative and cultural sectors as well as web developers, economists, lawyers, tour guides, cybersecurity experts, financial managers, biologists, etc. The scope of work was similarly diverse: most of them worked in government organizations, although they were also self-employed, freelancers and people from the private sector.

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The purpose of the survey was to find out the opinion of the public and potential visitors about museums and their operation in Georgia. What does the public think, what do they like and dislike about visiting museums? What is the reason they visit the museums and what are the causes of their lack of motivation? In addition, the survey painted a general picture of the importance of audience engagement in the development of the museum sector and emphasized individual perceptions of public engagement in the museum sector. The questionnaire was formulated to give respondents the opportunity to reflect on their past experiences in museums and to express their opinions about Georgian museums today. There were open and closed questions. The survey was based on the principles of ethical research: personal consent was obtained from each of the respondents individually, 70% of whom agreed to the use of their data for the analysis and 30% of whom agreed to the use of their answers for the analysis but preferred to remain incognito.

The survey also focused on whether Georgia visitors are satisfied with the services and environment provided to them by the museum sector. The main ideas were related to the overall operation and presentation of the museum. It was also about participation and how people are presented at the museum, including the content of museum exhibitions and the narratives that organizations create. The narrative is about the nation and its heritage; therefore, the public should be well and appropriately presented in the exhibition content, such as access to the museums, not only physically but also emotionally.

In this thesis, two cases are studied in detail: The Niko Pirosmani Museum in Mirzaani and the Museum of Religion in Batumi. I made study trips to both museums to meet with museum staff, visit the spaces and analyze them from a different point of view, as well as take some photographs. The Niko Pirosmani Museum was closed during the fall October 2021 trip due to Covid regulations. I spoke with a museum staff member and conducted a participative observation. The

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guards opened the space only for my study visit. In comparison, the Museum of Religion in Batumi was also under construction when I made a second study visit in January 2022. The room was under construction and the exhibit had been removed. I was able to interview the museum director.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter provides a historical overview of how external factors played a role in the institutionalization of the Georgian museum. The focus is on state structures to show the system in which state museums, including the case study museums, function. The second chapter focuses on the analysis of participatory politics, including the examination of Georgian policy documents and mechanisms related to the museum sector. It highlights the importance of audience engagement supported by policy. Both chapters identify the need to train and upskill museum staff to promote public engagement. The third chapter presents the research findings related to engagement in Georgian museums and brings the good international practices of engagement that may be relevant to the local context. The fourth chapter presents various tools to facilitate participation and promote different approaches among museum professionals. This is followed by the training module, developed by the thesis author, which highlights the main concepts for audience involvement and serves as material for self-monitoring.

The thesis aims to initiate a general discussion on the importance of audience participation for Georgian museums as one of the core values of the organization. It aims to present a practical training module for museum practitioners that can be adapted for any museum and help them understand the importance of audience engagement for the Georgian museums.

Chapter 1. Museums of Georgia: History, Institutional Contexts, Participatory Approaches

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical overview of the context in which Georgia's state museums emerged. The institutionalization of museums is closely linked to the history of the country; therefore, it is important to examine how the management systems practiced in museums were established. In addition, this chapter examines the state structures that influence participatory practices in museums.

1.1. The Emergence of Museums in Georgia

The institutionalization of cultural heritage has always been critical to its preservation, protection, and maintenance. Georgian history has greatly influenced the evaluation of museums, including the facilitation of participation and its application. Recently, governments and politicians have begun to view cultural heritage more as a phenomenon of representation of one's country, and the importance of protecting cultural heritage has become even more significant. This attitude is supported by policy documents and public speeches, according to which the institutionalization of cultural heritage is a promising process, as well as the establishment of organizations such as libraries, archives, and museums to collect, protect and promote the cultural heritage of nations.

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus on the border between Europe and Asia (see Figure 1). Therefore, the international geopolitical situation has always strongly influenced the country and its nation, including its culture and cultural heritage. At the same time, the country has always been subject to invasions due to its important location. Therefore, Georgians have always had to protect their country, religion, and culture.

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In the early period there were some attempts to protect the heritage by placing the items in guarded places. From the late 18th century, the concept of the importance of cultural heritage to the nation became the basis for the creation of the modern museum.

In 1783, the Russian Emperor and the King of Kartli-Kakheti concluded the Georgievsk Treaty, according to which East Georgia was placed under Russian protection. Russia abolished Georgian royal status (kingdom) and made the country the center of the South Caucasus under Russian imperial rule. Georgia then became heavily influenced by Russian culture, including the establishment of cultural institutions. This cultural invasion included Russian-controlled museums, through which Russia was able to influence the mentality of the Georgian population and exercise power in the region.[11]

Figure 1-Map of Georgia, Source: File:Administrative Divisions of Georgia (country) - en.svg - Wikimedia Commons

[11] Dr. Anchabadze, George. "History of Georgia", *Internet Archive - Way Back Machine,* September 27, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20070927030932/http:/iberiana.iatp.ge/georgia.htm.

The first attempt to establish a museum organization on the territory of Georgia was the Caucasus Museum of the Russian Geographical Society in 1852 (finally established in 1965), which then was transformed into the Georgian National Museum. in 1887, the government in Tbilisi opened the Caucasus Silk Station, which was the basis for the establishment of the Silk Museum. In 1888, "Church Museum" and "Military Museum" were opened aiming to maintain ecclesiastical vessels, manuscripts, military equipment, photographs and painting of wars and relics.[12] In 1899, the Caucasus Museum of Applied Arts was established as a platform for the presentation of local culture. The directors of these institutions were Russians, who limited the participation of Georgian local authorities. Therefore, the museums were used as instruments for Russian politics and propaganda.[13]

Levan Chilashvili was a Georgian archeologist and historian who initially worked on museology and produced educational materials about museums; he was also the former director of the Georgian National Museum. Levan emphasizes in his works that the institutionalization of the museum was a logical process that considered the development of monument conservation and science. [14] The name comes from the ancient Greek "museion" and means "temple of the Muses". He says that museums are systematic organizations that work in science and education, study objects and take care of them, but ultimately the museum has the function of educating the public and shaping its development. He sees the museum as a base for the development of various

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[12] Chilashvili, Levan, "Museology, and Museum Work Principles", Tbilisi: *Tbilisi University Publishing,* 1984, https://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/291774/1/Muzeummcodneoba_Da_Samuzeumo_Saqmis_Safudzvlebi.pdf .

[13] Karaia, Inga. "Beginning the New Era - The Democratic Republic of Georgia, 1918 - 1921," ed. Roin Metreveli, *International Scientific Conference,* Tbilisi: Caucasus University Publishers, 2018, https://bit.ly/3H9vOhF.

[14] Chilashvili, "Museology and Museum Work Principles," 4-13.

scientific fields: Numismatics, Ethnography, Archeology, etc. He points out that the museum and the public are very closely linked and inseparable.[15]

In addition to the Russian-dominated early museum scene, Karaia reports some attempts to establish museums with the participation of Georgians. One such example was an archeological museum founded by the Georgian Literary Society, which was the first attempt to appoint Georgians to senior positions in the organization. The museum had neither a building nor financial resources and soon had to close. These attempts were crucial in establishing the national heritage institution as one of the main actors in the preservation of the national heritage. The organization was able to exert a positive influence on the local public and social development, including the shaping of national ideas and their promotion.[16]

The Georgian Society of History and Ethnography initiated the establishment of the Georgian Museum in 1907. Among many obstacles, during the preparation process, researchers collected many objects that were included in the collection of the Georgian National Museum. The Georgian Museum collection included 2,431 archaeological and ethnographic objects, more than 8,000 documents, 1,427 handwritten sources/objects, 550 knitwear, 62 statues, 585 works of art, 73 replicas of frescoes, and 38,893 coins. The collection formed the basis for the establishment of the Georgian National Museum.[17] Some of these attempts can be seen as bottom-up initiatives, where locals wanted to create unity for cultural heritage and support the shaping of national identity. This type of engagement can be understood as public participation. Dr. Elizabeth Rodini says that the modern museum, as a secular space for public engagement and instruction through the presentation of objects, is closely linked to several institutions that emerged simultaneously in 18th and 19th

[15] Chilashvili, "Museology and Museum Work Principles," 10.
[16] Karaia, “Beginning the New Era,” 4-5.
[17] Chilashvili, "Museology and Museum Work Principles," 55.

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century in Europe: Nationalism associated with colonial expansion, democracy, and the Enlightenment. The closest thing to a museum in early modern Europe were the cabinets of curiosities assembled by curious nobles, wealthy merchants, and scholars. Created at a time when Europe was moving into the "new" continents and cultures, the Wunderkammer were places where the riches of the world were collected, interpreted, and put on display.[18] The 18th and the first half of the 19th century can be considered the time of the emergence of the modern museum organization, a time when museums became legal entities. The development of the Georgian museum followed the European organizational standards.[19] To sum up, the tendencies in Europe and Georgia in building an ethnic national identity were similar.

1.2.Georgian Museums in the 20th and 21st Century

Georgia gained its first independence in 1918-1921 and became the Democratic Republic of Georgia. National organizations were established to preserve and present Georgian cultural heritage and national identity. On August 1, 1918, the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia renamed the Caucasus Museum as the Georgian Museum, whose purpose was to "collect materials, research and analyze collections describing Georgia and its surroundings, including nature, ethnography and historical archeology".[20] The museum included five different departments dealing with geology, botany, zoology, ethnography and historical archeology. Originally, the museum belonged to the Ministry of Public Education, which financially supported the purchase of relics and cultural objects from the people, e.g. numismatics, art objects, weapons, clothing and

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[18] Dr. Rodini, Elizabeth. "A Brief History of the Art Museum," in Museums in History, Unit 3, *Khan Academy*, n.d., https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/approaches-to-art-history/tools-for-understanding-museums/museums-in-history/a/a-brief-history-of-the-art-museum-edit.
[19] Chilashvili, "Museology and Museum Work Principles," 16-20.
[20] Democratic Republic of Georgia, "First Georgian Democratic Republic Legislation / Act of Laws", Referred to Karaia I. paper "The First Democratic Republic of Georgia," 1990.

jewelry, handwritten documents, etc. The Georgian Museum has collected significant materials and started cooperation with the European museums in Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome.[21]

Georgia had been a member of the Soviet Union for 70 years since 1921, when the Red Army invaded the country; therefore, Soviet policies and lifestyle were adopted by Georgians daily. In the 1930s, freedom of expression was severely restricted due to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's Great Purge. As a result, museums as platforms for cultural expression lacked openness and reflection, which automatically led museum leaders to not be open to criticism and broad public engagement.[22] Most national museum buildings were built and financed during Soviet times. There was a great interest in investing in culture to make it an instrument of Soviet propaganda. One of the case studies: the Niko Pirosmani Museum was established in 1960 by the central government in two different places: in the village of Mirzaani, where he was born and grew up, and in Tbilisi, where he died.[23] The museum belongs to the National Agency for Cultural Heritage and, is the house museum of a well-known artist – Niko Pirosmanashvili (see Figure 2).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia faced the challenge of rebuilding its cultural identity and national organizations. In addition to the war with Russia over the region of Abkhazia in 1991-92, Georgia also experienced a civil war. The conflicts and the chaotic situation had a negative impact on the cultural and creative sectors. It took decades for the institutions to be democratized and the thematic organizations to be united under certain umbrella associations/ministries.[24]

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[21] Karaia, "Beginning the New Era", 7.
[22] Qadagidze, Tamar. "Stalin's Great Terror / The simple questions about 1937ies," *Jam News (blog)*, February 11, 2020, https://jam-news.net/ge/stalinis-didi-terori-yvelaze-martivi-kitkhvebi-1937/.
[23] "Official Webpage of Niko Pirosmani," n.d., https://georgianmuseums.ge/museum/digital-museum-in-gurjaani/.
[24] Janos, Adams. "Was the Soviet Union's Collapse Inevitable? Some Blame Mikhail Gorbachev for the Collapse of the Soviet Union. But the Economy and Political Structure Were Already in Deep Decay.," *History.Com,* April 15, 2018, https://www.history.com/news/why-did-soviet-union-fall.

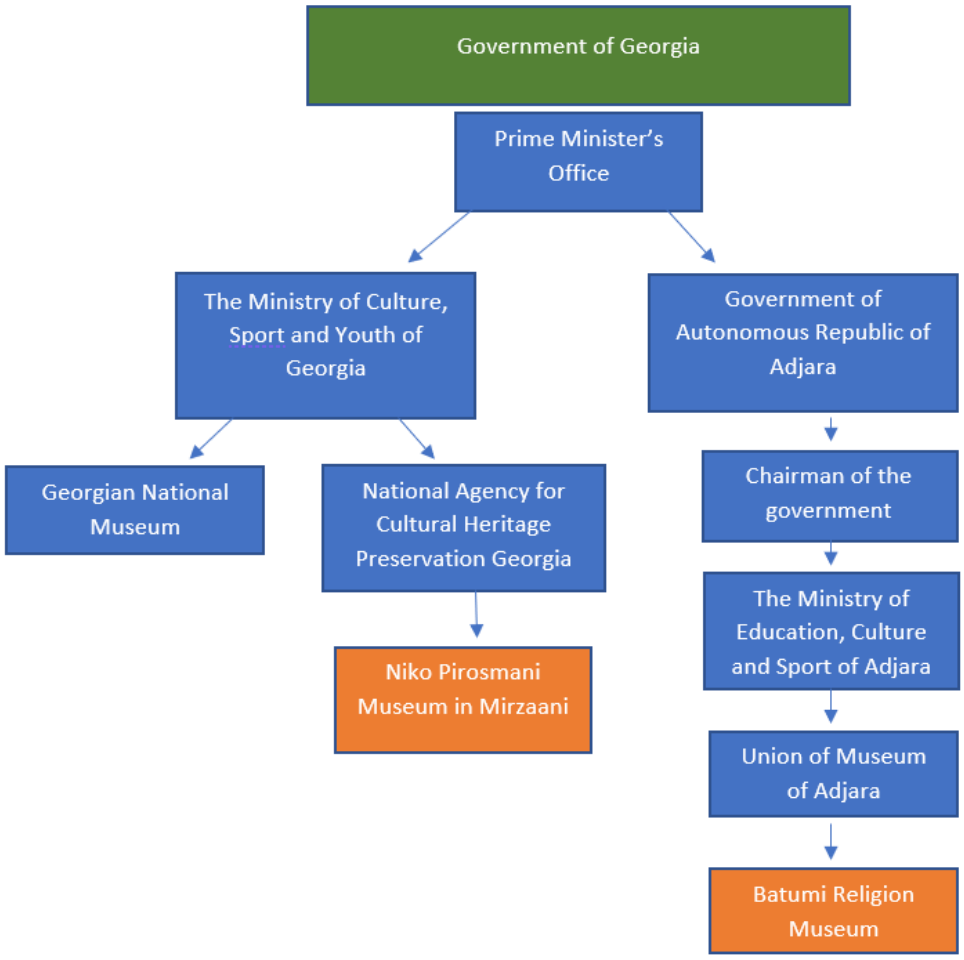

Figure 2 - The structure of the Government of Georgia in relation to the museum sector and case studies

In 2003, the so-called Rose Revolution took place in Georgia, which looked like a new beginning of the country's development. Many reforms were carried out in various spheres. In 2004, by the order of the President of Georgia, the Georgian National Union of Museums united 18 different museums throughout Georgia.[25] Based on the research conducted in 2004, important challenges and issues emerged in museum policy that required elaboration and development. Initial attempts to engage the public and make research-based progress were initiated during these changes. Based

[25] GNM, "Georgian National Museum / Description of the System," Organizational, www.museum.ge, n.d., http://museum.ge/?lang_id=ENGGEO&sec_id=87.

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on the research, the recommendations gave a certain direction to the Georgian government to reform the museum sector to approach the international standards of museum service.[26]

The Georgian government has developed policies to address institutional and administrative issues, such as improving legislation and developing operating standards for museums, supporting capacity-building and skills development programs, and strengthening cooperation with communities and other institutions. Today, there are 231 museums, 18 of which are funded by the state; 9 of the 231 museums belong to the city of Tbilisi and are funded from the Tbilisi city budget; the others are regional museums owned and funded by municipalities.[27]

On May 3, 2018, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara in western Georgia established the Association of Museums of Adjara under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Adjara. It united seven museums, including the Batumi Museum of Religion, founded in 2004, on September 17.[28] Adjara is famous for centuries of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic minorities and religious groups. The Batumi Museum of Religion is a symbol of tolerance and is a member of the Union and operates under the umbrella of the regional government.

According to the general standards of public organizations, a person must have at least a bachelor's degree to be eligible as a future civil service employee. The Civil Service Law establishes the minimum requirements and level of education that must be met in order to work in a museum.[29] Logically, the modern requirements do not correspond to the minimum wage, since it is not

[26] Arabuli, Nastasia. "The Fine Arts Museum Reconstruction Is Starting - Says the Minister, What Does It Mean for This and Other Museums?" *Radio Tavisufleba online publication,* April 21, 2021, https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31215775.html.
[27] Karaia, Inga. ICOM Georgian National Office, "Museum Policy Problems and Issues in Georgia," Regional Co-Operation for Cultural Heritage Development E-Journal N1, no. *Eastern Partnership Culture Programme / Euroeast Culture (n.d.),* http://www.rcchd.icomos.org.ge/?l=E&m=4-4&JID=1&AID=8&l2.
[28] "Official Web-Page of the Union of Museum of Adjara," Organizational, www.ajaramuseums.ge, n.d., https://ajaramuseums.ge/about.
[29] Parliament of Georgia, "Law on Public Service, Chapter V, Article 27," Pub. L. No. 010320000.05.001.017921, 4346-Iს (2015), https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3031098?publication=37.

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possible to live on such a small salary. The Georgian National Statistics Institute documents that the average wage in 2021 for the other services and activities is 1003.9 gel per month, which is about 300-350 EUR.[30] The average monthly salary of a museum employee is 300 gel (100 EUR), and they must work full-time (40 hours per week).[31] Clearly, the salaries at museums suggest that working at the museum does not have a high level of social appreciation and prestige.

A historical overview showed that the development of the museum sector is a long process shaped by different historical events, governments, and situations. Public participation in the museum sector development processes took different forms. Public presence in the museum sector was active during the period of national construction, which was stopped by the Soviet Union. After 1991 Georgia joined international trends and participation appeared on the scene. The historical account shows that it was not easy for Georgia to remain independent, and it always had to fight for freedom, which affects the quality of institutionalization of cultural organizations. The museum sector is in a process of transformation and has still not reached the highest standards of management. Since the Georgian organizational system has inherited SU top-down structures, participatory processes encounter difficulties, as they require a change of policy at the national level and its implementation. This I plan to examine in Chapter 2.

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[30] Georgian National Statistics Office, "Statistics on Average Monthly Income in Georgia in 2021," n.d., https://www.geostat.ge/media/43938/18.03.2022_Infographic_Eng.pdf.
[31] Radio Atinati, "Employees of Dadiani Museum have the video message to the Prime-minsiter," *News*, November 10, 2019, https://www.radioatinati.ge/regioni/article/70510-dadianebis-muzeumis-thanamshromlebi-khelfasebis-momatebis-mothkhovnith-premier-ministrs-mimarthaven-video-.html.

Chapter 2. Georgian Museum Development and Policy Context

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of international and national policy instruments in the museum sector and participation practices. It analyzes how policy documents and their implementation support the development of the museum sector. Participation is not yet fully integrated into institutional policy and practice; fortunately, top museum leadership is expressing a willingness to change systematic methods and incorporate more engaging approaches. Without public participation, museums cannot achieve their essential goal of being a social platform for cultural exchange. As the Republic of Georgia actively seeks to apply democratic principles in all areas, the following chapter examines the situation in this regard.

It will examine the global trend of democratization in Europe that Georgia is following, and the role of politics and the public's perception of the basic principles that contemporary museums must be resilient, adaptable, flexible, and open to engagement. The context will be the shift to a new customer-centered paradigm in Georgia. I will also focus on the cases of the Museum of Religion in Batumi and the Pirosmani Museum in Mirzaani.

2.1. International Policies on Participation in Museums

Participation is a fundamental right according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the General Assembly of the UN, which guarantees and addresses, among other rights, the right to participate in cultural life.[32] This is one of the first initiatives that strongly supports public participation and recognizes it as a right of the people. It follows on from the declaration of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which concluded that

[32] United Nations General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," § Article 27, 1948, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

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cultural heritage is a common good and recognized that protecting it is in the public interest.[33] Indeed, museums are cultural heritage institutions, and heritage is understood as a common good that belongs to all. Therefore, citizens should have the opportunity to participate in the processes involved. To practice participation, each country must have appropriate policies and apply them in real life.

Participatory approaches in the museum field have a long history. More recently, this approach has become widespread as countries began to apply democratic principles to governance. The 20th century was a lesson for Europe and the whole world to relearn the values of human existence and meaning. World War I and World War II accelerated the idea of peace and the well-being of people. Many international associations were founded to serve as a guarantee of future peace, stability, and preservation of cultural heritage, such as UNESCO and ICOM.[34]

UNESCO played an important role in the creation of ICOM, which was intended to bring together all museums on an international level since the institutions that housed the physical collections represented a large part of world culture. Therefore, the organization was established as a non-governmental organization (NGO) to strengthen international cooperation and networking among museums. UNESCO in the statement on the basic mission of ICOM states, "As the most important global institution for the preservation of cultural heritage in all its forms - tangible and intangible, movable and immovable - museums play an important role in stimulating creativity, providing opportunities for research, formal and informal education. In so doing, they contribute to social and human development." In 1971, ICOM began to expand and opened its doors to individuals.

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[33]Sciacchitano, Erminia. Secretariat of the OMC group on behalf of the European Commission., European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, and D1 Culture Policy Unit, "Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage," *Report of the OMC (open method of coordination)*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, April 2018.

[34] Briney, Amanda. "An Overview and History of UNESCO, The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization," *ThoughtCo,* April 10, 2019, https://www.thoughtco.com/unesco-history-and-overview-1435440.

At that time, the "museum profession" was understood as a profession, subject to ethical obligations.[35]

The ICOM Code of Professional Ethics (1986) was the first attempt to establish basic standards for museums. It aims to secure and maintain public confidence in museums and seeks to uphold the core concept of public service and the original mission of protecting heritage. It is not considered a law that sets out the obligations of museums but represents the general structure of principles for the operation and management of museums. The ICOM Code sets out, in eight main ethical principles, the key issues for the operation of a museum and identifies its values and issues for the protection of cultural heritage. The Code focuses on the core values of the museum, namely the preservation, interpretation, collection, and promotion of cultural heritage, close collaboration with communities, and the role of the educator.[36]

The ICOM office in Georgia has been operating since 2006. Since then, the scope of the organization's work has expanded; in addition, the Georgian government has implemented several reforms to enable Georgian museums to operate in a contemporary manner. According to Lana Karaia, the current head of ICOM Georgia, only one museum - the Georgian Museum of Fine Arts - is currently an ICOM member. However, she says that most museums follow the general principles of protection of cultural heritage and cultural representation of the state.[37]

Principles I, II, V, and VI emphasize the connection between museum institutions and the public. Some ICOM principles are incorporated in the Law of Georgian Museums and represent obligations for the institution. For example, Georgian museums are obligated to preserve, interpret,

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[35] Murphy, Bernice L. "Charting the Ethics Landscape for Museums in a Changing World," *Museums, Ethics, and Cultural Heritage*, Ch. 4, Oxford: Routledge, 2016. 24-25.
[36] ICOM International Council of Museums and Adopted by ICOM General Assembly, Code of Ethics of ICOM, Seoul, Korea: ICOM, 2004.
[37] Karaia, Interview on Museum Sector in Georgia.

and promote culture and care for the collection, and use it for social good. Museums are also responsible for education, and the ideas are accurately supported by state law. The organizations should provide opportunities for public service and their development and operate legally and professionally.[38]

The international policies are relevant in the Georgian context, museum staff needs professional training to understand and learn why it is necessary for museums to have strong and open interaction with the public. Although the top management of the museums and the two directors of the case studies with whom I conducted interviews, Dali Abashidze (Niko Pirosmani Museum) and Marika Mostkobili (Batumi Religion Museum), express their willingness to open the museum spaces for engagement, in practice both museums lack interaction.[39]

The Scholar and the chair of the ICOM Ethics Committee from 2005-2011, Bernice identifies ethics and distinguishes it from museum morality. He points out that museum ethics sometimes involve difficult choices between different options. For example, public collections, which secure the public trust and honor the public benefits of museums are considered inalienable by law. However, in its 2004 revision, the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums clarifies that museums are required to consult communities not only on interpretation but also on restitution or repatriation.[40] The involvement of experts, therefore, seems urgent, as the public may not have the appropriate knowledge and professionalism in the field. In the ICOM Principles, public participation is an important aspect, and the involvement of professionals in the field can be crucial in some situations.

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[38] Government of Georgia, "Law of Georgia on Museums, Chapter I - General Provisions," Pub. L. No. 990, 450.090.060.05.001.000.956 (2001), https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/15508/2/en/pdf.
[39] Motskobili, Marika. Batumi Religion Museum Head, Interview on Batumi Religion Museum Opportunities and Future Plans, January 22, 2022.
[40] Bernice, "Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage," 26-29.

The Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005) establishes individual and collective responsibility for heritage, which means social engagement and participation in cultural heritage processes. In 2010 Georgia signed the Convention, on April 1, 2011, it ratified the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), and finally, the Convention entered into force on June 1, 2011.[41] This was one of the first steps in outlining the framework for considering the role of citizens in cultural processes. Since the Faro Convention is first and foremost a convention about society, for society, and to promote social engagement, citizen participation became an ethical obligation and a political necessity. It strengthens democracy and creates a participatory model.[42] Since the Faro Convention, many local organizations in Georgia have intervened in the heritage conservation process. The context of the Faro Convention is partially integrated into Georgian policies that incorporate social issues and cultural processes. It promotes meaningful public participation and implementation through the involvement of various stakeholders in cultural processes. Tbilisi also hosted the third regional seminar: Faro Convention on Concrete Measures for the Protection of Cultural Heritage on June 10-11, 2021, with participants from 20 Council of Europe member states.[43]

Another international policy document that identifies several aspects of innovative approaches to museum participation is the Participatory Governance in Cultural Heritage Report.[44] The report suggests that states could increase public awareness of cultural heritage values by involving all

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[41] Kharatishvili, Levan. "Application of Faro Principles in Georgia, an Overview," Fourth Regional Seminar:" Faro Convention: from words to action", Bucharest, Romania, October 14, 2021.
[42] Council of Europe, Directorate of Democratic Governance, DG II, and Managing Diversity Division, "Framework Convention of the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society," *Faro Convention,* n.d., https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/see.
[43] Kharatishvili, Levan. Creative Strategies Lab, "Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society – Faro Convention", Tbilisi, Georgia: *Creative Labs Georgia,* n.d., https://rm.coe.int/third-regional-seminar-faro-convention-for-concrete-action-on-cultural/1680a5c61f.
[44] Sciacchitano, "Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage," 2018.

interested parties in decision-making, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. There may be critical cases where professionals and experts are as important as citizens, as citizens may not have sufficient knowledge to make the 'right' decision under the current legal framework. Nevertheless, in democratic countries, it is the duty of the state to make the process transparent. In the Georgian context, most museums are also state-funded institutions; therefore, democratic principles should apply in practice.[45]

The document presents the most important aspects of the engagement: Strong relationships between stakeholders seem essential; they allow the public to gather around the monument, site, artwork, etc., and express their emotions and attitudes, and collaboration builds trust. This is rarely the case in Georgia museums, and the survey conducted in the frame of this MA thesis, found that the relationship is not always comfortable for the public. Flexibility and support are critical to achieving widespread support for projects. According to Georgian practices, flexibility varies widely across museum structures, as management is top-down, and bottom-up initiatives are minimal.

Competition and staff training can be evaluated in terms of public interest. The process should be transparent, and stakeholders should be open-minded. Another point that is missing in the Georgian museum context is that museum staff need continuous training to develop their professional skills, e.g., through international exchange programs, training, meetings, etc. Since these activities are rarely carried out in Georgian museums, competence and training are needed. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the Covid pandemic has changed the approach of museums;

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[45]Sciacchitano, "Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage," 27-29.

therefore, museum professionals must also adjust, update their knowledge, and adequately address current issues.

The transparency of the processes may also be questioned by the public. Using the same language can be crucial, but a lack of transparency can mean that it is sometimes difficult for citizens to access institutions and make their voices heard. Participation is only possible when all stakeholders have access to valid and up-to-date information about every aspect of the management of heritage institutions and organizations. Transparency is also a shortcoming in the Georgian museum landscape. There have been many changes in the system of ministries, and the Cultural Strategy 2025 is no longer considered and implemented by the state, but the Georgian people have not been informed about the new decisions of the government. Moreover, the public did not have access to the internal processes in the cultural sector, including the museum sector.[46]

Overall, Georgian museums try to incorporate international policies into their practices. However, Georgian museums need external support from the state to implement all eight principles of ICOM at the highest level. To accelerate progress, the state also needs to support the museum sector, not only by incorporating international policy documents but also by their application through the development of participatory principles in museums.

2.2. Exploring Participation in Georgian National Policy Context

Georgia gained its independence in 1991, and since then state institutions have evolved. The country has moved closer to the EU style of work and democratization so that the institutions also tend to be democratic and involve the public. Over time, the Georgian state has created several policy documents that serve as the main guidelines for the cultural sphere, including the museum

[46] Sciacchitano, "Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage," 42-44.

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sector. In 2001, the Law on Museums was enacted, the main document governing all types of museums in the country. The term 'museum' is used in the Law of Georgia on Museums and States: "Museum - a legal entity registered and/or established in accordance with procedures established by law, the purpose of which is to carry out scientific, research, cultural and educational activities and to identify, collect, register, protect, research, exhibit and publicize cultural heritage."[47]

The Law on Museums, adopted by the Government of Georgia on June 22, 2001, regulates the operation and management of the museum sector. It determines the types of museums, the different categories, the rights, and duties of state bodies in managing museum activities, etc. The main objectives of this law are a) to establish the basic principles of museum activities and use of museums; b) to provide state guarantees for museum activities; c) to establish the principles of management and financing of the Georgian museum system; d) to establish the categories of museums; e) to legitimize the non-state sector in museum activities; f) to establish the basic rights and obligations of natural and legal persons involved in museum activities.[48]

In 2000, the Georgian government enacted a special law on the culture that promotes participation and public engagement. Article 11 on the right to cultural values states everyone has the right to experience cultural values and to use state libraries, museums, and archives within the limits of the law.[49] The document places the general principles for culture in a broader context of museum law. In the 2000s, Georgia began developing policies for the museum sector to make its operations more transparent and to enable it to engage communities.

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[47]Government of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Museums, Chapter I - General Provisions. June 22, 2001. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/15508/2/en/pdf
[48] Law of Georgia on Museums, Chapter I.
[49] Parliament of Georgia, "Georgian Law on Culture," 450.000.000.05.001.000.217 751 § (1997), July 31, 1997. https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/31402?publication=13.

The State Cultural Strategy 2025, prepared by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection and adopted by the Georgian government in 2016, established eight main strategic goals, among which the museum sector is listed in each case.[50] The strategy also helps raise awareness of the new role of culture in social well-being and sustainable development by highlighting the role of culture and creativity in the country's economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. The vision of the Strategy is to develop Georgia as a creative country and regional center where innovation and creativity, together with the protection and revitalization of national identity, cultural heritage, and cultural diversity, are the cornerstones of social well-being and sustainable development.[51]

One of the goals of creating the document was to promote good cultural management and to integrate democratic principles into the work of the sector. It is a fundamental document that defines the practice at the national, regional, and/or local levels to transform cultural institutions and promote a creative environment. Although the document was initially highlighted and promoted, it has gradually been forgotten by the state and top managers in the cultural sector. Frequent changes in government bodies and the merging of various ministries created an unfavorable situation for policy implementation.

A separate chapter is dedicated to cultural heritage, with tasks focused on the development of cultural heritage institutions, including museums, libraries, and archives. "Development of specific instruments such as small and medium-sized museums, relevant projects, exhibitions, etc., for a

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[50] Cultural Policy Division, "Cultural Strategy of Georgia 2025", The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2016, http://creativegeorgia.ge/en/n/startegic-documents/saqartvelos_kulturis_strategia_2025GNVIGIQ6Z51646922381.
[51] UNESCO, "Georgian Cultural Strategy 2025," n.d., https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/georgian-culture-strategy-2025.

comprehensive presentation of various cultural and natural heritage areas, specific knowledge and traditions, unique landscapes, flora, and fauna, and other related phenomena."[52]

The state supports the development of cultural processes, including upgrading infrastructure and providing funding for new community participation initiatives. However, the Ministry does not adhere to the officially established strategic goals. In addition to the main directions, thematic priorities, and goals for the development of the museum sector were presented.[53]

Goals of Museum Sector Development, Cultural Strategy 2025:

1. Support local and international collaboration to share expertise and museum practices and develop training programs for museum staff (audience education, foreign languages, fundraising and network building, communication with people with disabilities, strategic design, marketing, etc.).
2. Support new initiatives (e.g., museum nights, open houses, the museum in schools, etc.) to promote museums.
3. Supporting the protection and enrichment of Georgia museums' collections to preserve cultural heritage and prevent the migration of cultural heritage out of the country.
4. Encourage museums to apply new technologies, innovative approaches, and interactive electronic services, as well as to develop and use various software applications in collaboration with other museums, cultural institutions, universities, and the business sector.
5. Establish and develop virtual museums through the digitization of museum collections and the use of appropriate internet platforms, to promote research, improve public accessibility, attract visitors, and increase international awareness.
6. Support the development of museums into public spaces, and educational and research institutions through the implementation of various programs, including children and youth programs.

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[52] The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia and Georgian Government, "Cultural Strategy 2025," 2016, https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/georgian-culture-strategy-2025.
[53] "Cultural Strategy 2025," 26-28.

7. Support the establishment and development of thematic museums.
8. Supporting the efforts of museums to establish and develop restoration centres with higher standards that meet international criteria.

Goal #6 aims for the state to support the development of museums into public spaces, educational institutions, and research purposes through the implementation of various programs, including for children and youth. The goal is undoubtedly an impetus for the transformation of the museum into an open and public space that serves the public. Working with children is a forward-looking approach. By articulating these goals, the state encourages active participation in the museum field and is open to innovative approaches.

The law proves that the current governing party values cultural heritage and its role in shaping national identity. As John Pendlebury puts it, the value of heritage as a social 'consensus' is a process that expresses national identity. He points out that heritage policy is intertwined with cultural policy, but at the same time includes the management of the wider historical environment. The author points to social practice and ethics as generators of good government and emphasizes the importance of policy as an instrument of the administrative process that enables officials to interpret and apply policy.[54]

With the strategic document, the museum sector had the opportunity to expand and integrate various services. Georgian museums usually offer only permanent exhibitions, but as the survey results show, the public is interested in additional services and is willing to pay for them.

In addition, the Law of Georgia on Museums, chapter III, article 17, on the rights of state and non-state museums, has given state museums the right to produce goods using museum symbols and

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[54] Pendlebury, John. "Heritage and Policy," *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, chapter 26. ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 426-441.

objects and to carry out economic activities necessary for the museum.[55] Georgian law does not prevent museums from becoming businesses and earning their income; this requires approval from the Ministry. Museums are gradually becoming aware of the need for self-generated income, as the state provides the least amount of funding annually for the cultural sector, including museums. Nevertheless, most institutions are dependent on the state, and staff, including management, lack the initiative to transform the museum into a combined social, economic, and cultural space. This approach can also be understood as public participation in the funding of museums.

The decision-making process in the government is not transparent, and the management of the museum sector becomes chaotic because the top leadership in the government changes frequently. In addition, the Ministries of Education, Science, Culture, Sports, Youth, and Monument Protection have been merged and separated three times in the last five years. The most recent change took place in May 2021, when the new Georgian Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth was established with the Minister of Tea Tsulukiani.[56] The new minister has a new vision, and the 2025 cultural strategy has been removed from the state's focus. She initiated museum reforms and provided grants for the reconstruction of state museums. Frequent changes in management systems create obstacles and slow the pace of development of the museum sector in general, including democratization and public involvement. Reforms are fragmented and lack strategic thinking.[57] As a result of the current reforms, 20 employees of the Georgian National Museum have been

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[55] Law of Georgia on Museums, Chapter I - General Provisions.
[56] Government of Georgia, "Establishment of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth of Georgia / Ordinance of the Government of Georgia," May 19, 2021, https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/5171084?publication=0.
[57] Arabuli, "The Fine Arts Museum Reconstruction Is Starting - Says the Minister, What Does It Mean for This and Other Museums?".

dismissed, and over 100 employees of government cultural organizations have been laid off. There are suspicions that the Georgian National Museum union, established in 2004, may be abolished.[58]

The written policy documents illustrate the state's interest in creating a system for the museum sector through which operations and management could be regulated, accounted for, and well-represented. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia began building national institutions to protect its identity and present its unique cultural heritage in museums. The standardization and transformation of the entire sector, including modernization, involved the integration of new and participatory approaches, but implementation has been problematic because it is a new and unfamiliar trend for Georgians. The development of closer ties with the EU and political stability are motivating Georgian museum directors to experiment new approaches.

2.3. Policy Cycle in the Georgian Museums Sector

The policy is the general vision for each area set by state and/or local government to shape the structure of management and operations. In his essay "Heritage and Policy," John Pendlebury highlights, "We can see the policy as the mobilization of a particular set of values through a system of instrumental rationality that is theoretically underpinned by legitimate authority. It aims to facilitate stable and predictable approaches to goals." In analyzing the relationship between heritage and policy, he sees heritage policy not only as a separate field "policy for heritage", but also as an instrumental means of achieving other social and economic policy goals.[59] Policy needs instruments and tools to be applicable in real life. Therefore, the policy must provide a set of values through a system of institutional rationality underpinned by legitimate authority. Like other

[58] Agenda.ge, "Union vows to fight 'unlawful mass dismissal' of Georgian National Museum employees," *News,* May 26, 2022, https://agenda.ge/en/news/2022/1938.
[59] Pendlebury, "Heritage and Policy," 426 - 441.

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countries, Georgia has a specific cultural policy focused on the museum sector. For the political cycle, as defined by Knill and Tolsun, each element is important to function. The Georgian government and the Georgian Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth are responsible for setting the agenda and formulating the policy. They are the leaders who set the government agendas and policies. The Georgian Association of Museums and the National Agency for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Georgia - which is an umbrella organization for state museums - participate in the adaptation and implementation of the policy together with the state museums of Georgia. They are responsible for the application of the policy documents in practice and the implementation of the corresponding measures. Based on the results, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth of Georgia makes an assessment and then formulates the new policy agenda. The different stages of this process are closely interrelated and involve the main stakeholders of the Georgian museum sector (see Figure 3).[60]

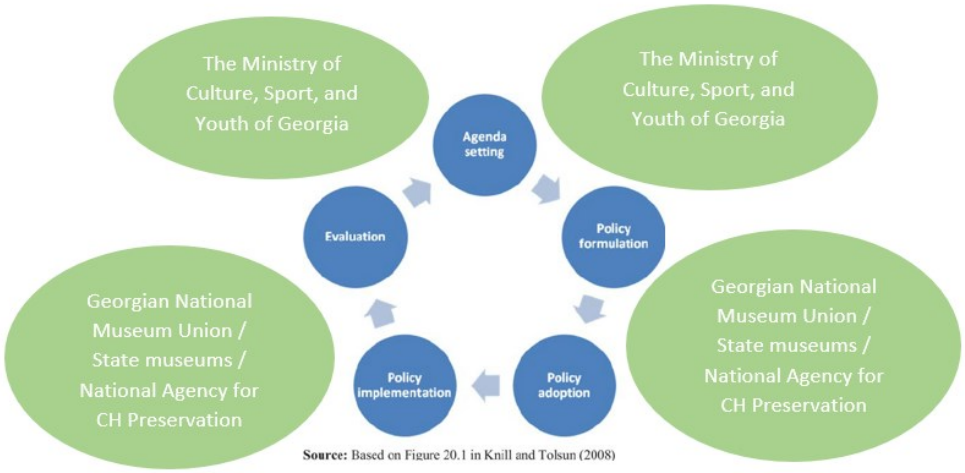

Figure 3 - Policy Cycle and Georgian Structure, Miles, Ian. The University of Manchester, "Dynamic Foresight Evaluation," Foresight 14, no. 1, February 2012, 69–81, https://doi.org/10.1108/14636681211210378.

[60] Miles, Ian. The University of Manchester, "Dynamic Foresight Evaluation," *Foresight 14,* no. 1, February 2012, 69–81, https://doi.org/10.1108/14636681211210378.

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The state provides policy documents and instruments such as laws, special acts, and guidelines. Georgian museums must be able to align their vision with this, and if the participatory practice is on their policy agenda, they must develop initiatives and supporting tools that can foster public engagement. The Cultural Strategy 2025 focuses on the museum sector and encourages participation. It supports the development of museums into public spaces, educational institutions, and for research purposes through the implementation of various programs, including children and youth programs.[61] The Museum Act is the document that establishes the general structure of museum operations. It encourages museums to be a social place where the cultural heritage is well preserved and presented.[62]

In summary, each stage of the policy cycle is important to the success of the museum sector. This demonstrates that it is an interrelated process between the Georgian government and museums. Collaboration and communication at each stage can be the key aspect for the development of the sector, as the government sets the policy and the museums are the main actors in the process of policy implementation. As demonstrated above, public participation as a core value of the democratization process is also on the agenda of the Georgian government. The policy created supports the engagement and active participation of people in museums, and the practice requires more support and consideration from museum officials.

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[61] Cultural Policy Division, "Cultural Strategy of Georgia 2025," 30-31.
[62] Government of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Museums, Chapter I - General Provisions.

Chapter 3. Public Participation in the Georgian Museums

The historical and policy overview has shown that Georgian museums have developed gradually, depending on the era and the political agenda. This chapter will examine public engagement as part of museum communication. It presents a MA thesis survey analysis of Georgian museums' infrastructure, exhibition, communication, and operations. It analyzes respondent's opinions on public engagement and participation practices in Georgian museums. The chapter describes the participation models proposed by Nina Simon and analyzes each model in relation to the Georgian museum sector. Finally, the third chapter examines participatory practices in Georgian museums and some examples from abroad and that can be practiced in the local context. This is followed by case studies of the Niko Pirosmani and Batumi Museums of Religion and an analysis of public participation there.

3.1 Models of Participation in the Museums

Public engagement and communication are inseparable aspects of museum management and operations. Participation in cultural heritage organizations is understood differently in each country. In democratic societies, where people are at the center of the state, participation is a general practice. In contrast, in non-democratic countries, the state makes decisions without involving the public.[63]

Public engagement is also part of managing how museums communicate with audiences and what channels they use to reach audiences, convey messages, or expand audiences. More recently, Georgian museums have opened up more to social gatherings, but the inherited management systems did not support engagement. Staff used to emphasize human interaction, and visitors were

[63] Sciacchitano, "Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage," 27-28.

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merely recipients. In examining the Georgian scene, it is apparent that many museums still struggle with the lack of openness and public engagement. Furthermore, the evidence presented in this chapter shows that people often do not feel welcome when visiting Georgian museums.

In her presentation (TED talk), executive director of Oakland Museum, Lori Fogarty describes the relationship between museums and audiences and how important it is for people to have a sense of belonging when visiting museums. The speaker explains the Oakland Museum's example of opening the doors physically and metaphorically because they believe museums can change lives and positively impact the community. Since museums in the Georgian context are social institutions that serve the public, they should encourage and invite local communities to engage. To create such an environment, museums should provide good infrastructure and exciting narratives, train museum staff, and develop their professional skills for audience engagement.[64] Museum spaces are not just neutral exhibition areas and associated accessories. Through their location, diversity, accessibility, and atmosphere, they are key factors in the museum visitor experience. Spaces can be warm or cold, they can encourage exploration and discovery or support reflective learning, they can promote social interaction or enforce silence.[65]

Museums have recently become social places, but the covid pandemic has affected the development of the museum sector. It also created opportunities for different types of public engagement, including the development of social media communication. In addition, interactive exhibitions, where people can become part of the museum and touch the objects, participate in actions, and have meaningful experiences, have become a viral trend in general. Museums have

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[64] Fogarty, Lori. "How Museums Can Change Lives," TEDx Talk, Filmed on February 12, 2019, in Oakland, California, video, 8:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJkYsSQtqq0.
[65] Black, Graham. "Creating an Inclusive and Participative Museum Environment," *Museums and the Challenge of Change Old Institutions in a New World,* 1st ed., 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN: Routledge, New York, 2017, 161-171.

increasingly become open spaces by "opening the doors" to a wider audience. This is also well observed in the Georgian context. Robert R. Janes, one of today's most insightful museum critics, argues, "There are simply no better social institutions than museums to help define a sustainable future because they are based on humanity's successes and failures." This statement underscores that museums today increasingly recognize the importance of engaging diverse social communities and their public duty to preserve and share their common heritage.[66]

In her book on the participatory museum, Nina Simon focuses on audience engagement and its role in museum development. She explains two types of participatory principles: The difference between traditional and participatory design techniques is how institutions and visitors interact. In traditional exhibitions and programs, the institution provides content for visitors to consume; the content is easily understood by any visitor, regardless of background. In participatory design, on the other hand, "the institution serves as a "platform" that connects different users who act as creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators. This means that the institution cannot guarantee the consistency of visitor experiences. Instead, the institution provides opportunities for diverse experiences co-produced by visitors".[67]

Nina Simon, in her project report on Public Participation in Scientific Research (PPSR), identifies three main models of public participation: Contribution, Collaboration, and Co-design. Cultural institutions should decide which model works best for them. The models are:

- Contributing, when visitors can participate in the institutionally controlled process. Sharing platforms for communication is common.
- Collaborative, when visitors are invited to participate as active partners in the creation of institutional projects that are initiated and ultimately controlled by the institution.

[66] Bernice, "Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage," 26-29.
[67] Simon, Nina. "The Participatory Museum", Santa Cruz, California: Nina Simon CC Attribution-Non-Commercial / licenses under the Creative Commons Attribution, 2010, http://www.participatorymuseum.org/.

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- Co-design, when community members work with institutional staff from the outset to define the goals of the project and develop the program or exhibition based on community interests.
- Hosted - a fourth model added to the PPSR typology by Nina Simon. When the institution makes a portion of its facilities and/or resources available to present programs developed and carried out by public groups or casual visitors.[68]

Nina Simon acknowledges that in co-creation processes, the museum and the audience share a common goal; therefore, engagement and performance from both sides can be equal. Considering Nina Simon's participation models, Georgian museums essentially follow the traditional design. They often use contributory and collaborative approaches, but hosted and co-creative models are still new. Audiences are bystanders most of the time, and the museum does not support the community to provide a platform for dialogue and empowerment. My survey showed the same results (see the following subsections).

The content of the exhibit also plays an important role in audience engagement. To the question if the visitors like or dislike the exhibition content, responses are that the majority of 44% like the content, 38.5% like the exhibit narrative and the rest do not like it as much. The question may seem general, as the content of museum exhibitions may vary depending on the type of museum, whether it is a permanent or temporary exhibition, etc. The positive approach can be seen in the percentage count. Museums, as cultural heritage institutions, need to convey a story and a particular message that can be meaningful to people. One of the first principles of the ICOM Code of Ethics emphasizes that museums preserve, interpret, and promote the natural and cultural heritage of humanity.[69] The interpretation of the past lies in the representations that museums offer to visitors; if the public is not happy and/or satisfied with the content, the goal is not fully

[68] Simon, "The Participatory Museum," 9-10.
[69] ICOM, "Code of Ethics of ICOM," 3.

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achieved. It must also be mentioned that sometimes the museum management would like to make a new exhibition with certain content. But the poor conditions of the museum infrastructure do not let them interpret and be creative.

In her book, Nina Simon emphasizes the aspects of service to society and calls co-creation a meaningful experience. She acknowledges that the appropriate design of the communication platform is crucial for open participation. Simon points out that honesty can be a key to open participation, as audiences can be very closed and/or open depending on the tool's museums offer them. She says, it is important to turn the artifacts into mediators to start an interesting conversation or stimulate discussion. In this case, viewers become creative agents who initiate dialogues with other viewers - and the museum becomes a social platform for engagement. In this way, participation becomes a meaningful cultural experience. Nina Simon mentioned that museums ultimately create cultural bridges between art and people and between people to people.[70]

To explore how Georgian audiences perceive meaningful participation, the survey asked the appropriate questions on meaningful experience while visiting the museum, the aims of the visits in the museum, etc. Many of the respondents indicated that the current collections, the artifacts, the gold jewelry displayed at the Georgian National Museum, and the paintings were inspiring to them and were perceived as a meaningful experience because they saw some aspects from a different perspective; they had the opportunity to reflect and think deeply about the objects. One of the interviewees mentioned the open-air museum because the concept of having a museum in one space and a garden at the same time is not a common experience.

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[70] Simon, "Opening up the Museum: Nina Simon @ TEDxSantaCruz."

When we talk about participation, it is also interesting what kind of participation we focus on. Is it participation in decision making, where the inheritance that belongs to the people gives the people the right to participate in decision making, or is it just the recipient position and gaining experience? Wai Hin Wong points out that museums today are open to all segments of the population, whereas in the past they were considered more elitist places with special dress codes. Nowadays, museums encourage different age groups to enter the museum and offer special deals and discounted tickets for youth, school children, families, etc.[71]

The way museums care for the values of their collections is critical to the institutional position that sustains communities and heritage. This makes museums mediators and re-mediators as they reinterpret history. Bernice Murphy calls this process a signal of more active engagement by museums with the communities and societies they serve.[72] It is important to understand such an approach and analyze it in the Georgian context. From the observation of the Georgian museum, it appears that the top management wants to transform the organization into a more socially oriented place. The conceptual understanding that museums have the power and obligation to serve the public is included in the responses of interviews with museum professionals, and subsequent application rarely occurs. For example, the director of the Museum of Religion in Batumi points out the importance of the public and the museum acting as a mediator between the different populations in the region. However, this happens by chance and without prior planning or intervention by the museum. Dali Abashidze, the director of the Niko Pirosmani Museum, notes that the village of Mirzaani is geographically convenient, that there are many heritage sites there, and that the museum can promote engagement of the local community and act as a mediator and

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[71] Hin Wong, Wai. "Rethinking Participation in Museums," Hong Kong Polytechnic University, n.d., https://www.academia.edu/35359607/Rethinking_Participation_in_Museums.
[72] Bernice, "Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage," 11-14.

facilitator in transforming the village into a cultural place. She acknowledges that she would like to use other spaces owned by the museum and initiate artist residencies and visual arts festivals so that the village can become a storyteller and become the new brand for the museum.

3.2. Varieties of Participation

In this work, participation is considered as one of the principles of democracy and institutional development in the cultural sector. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the Georgian public's perception of public engagement in Georgian museums and to determine whether they feel included in this process. To find an answer, I organized an online survey in 2022 that was completed by 91 Georgian respondents. When asked if they felt welcome when they entered the museum, 23.1% responded that they felt welcome, 22% that they did not feel welcome, and 54.9% that they might feel welcome. For most of the respondents is not clear whether they are welcome or not at the museum. One of the reasons may be that there are no special signs in museums to indicate that one is welcome. In addition, staff usually do not smile at customers, and in my experience, they may not feel addressed when customers ask questions.

The following open question was asked, "If they felt welcome, why? And if they did not feel welcome, why?" to collect individual experiences based on the previous answers. Individuals who wrote in the open-ended responses that they felt welcome at museums emphasized that museum staff are happy to see someone interested in the museum; they smile and guide customers when needed. Employees feel good when they can share their knowledge with visitors. Some respondents feel that the atmosphere is not very welcoming and wrote that the service reflects something like a conservative and communist approach, including the lack of attention to visitors. One respondent shared a personal story: when she visited the Soviet Occupation Museum and asked for a tour, she found that there was no guide service in the Occupation Department.

Then the museum staff asked many questions, and she felt that the environment was not comfortable for anyone. "Georgian museums need to find ways to make their environment more inviting. There are good professionals, but museum staff needs to be trained to learn more about international standards and protocols."[73] The answers also include aspects such as very low salaries for museum employees, so they do not enjoy their work, or they do not love their job. In addition, the infrastructure, if the environment affects the mood of people, they might not like to stay there.

The inadequate, unstructured rooms, which are sometimes not heated at all in the museum, can be very harsh in winter (The Silk State Museum) and affect employees' motivation. Furthermore, in the museum environment, there are other aspects that affect the motivation of museum staff; one of them is the limited opportunities for professional development. There are training programs for museum practitioners by ICOM Georgia, which holds various events for museum staff, but they are not comparable to the international experience, which has an overall positive impact.[74]

Those who wrote "maybe they feel welcome" emphasized that the attitude is very blurred, staff are polite, but visitors do not get the feeling that they are happy to see the visitors in the museum. One of the interviewees tells a personal story about when she visited an exhibition of Niko Pirosmani with friends. She felt suspiciously controlled by the security guard and felt that he was following her all the time, so she could not enjoy the visit and felt stressed. "In regional museums, the museum staff is happy when local people are interested in the content they are teaching, so you feel welcome. In some museums, people are so demotivated by all the problems museums face that they are just bored and do not show a lot of emotion; it's hard to tell if museum staff are happy

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[73] "Survey on 'Towards Participatory Governance of Museums in Georgia,'" 2022.
[74] ICOM Georgia Head Office, Lana Karaia, Interview on Museum Sector in Georgia.

to have visitors." One of the indications given by the interviewees is that the staff in the smaller galleries are the most welcoming to visitors, which is not the case in the large and state museums.[75]

The analysis of access to Georgian museums clearly shows that the infrastructure of modern museums in Georgia does not fully meet the needs and expectations of visitors. 12.1% of respondents do not find the museum infrastructure so good, 51.6% still find it ok, only 26.4% find it good, and 2.2% (2 respondents) stated that they find the museum infrastructure in Georgia very good. 7.7% do not find the museum infrastructure good at all.

According to the interview with Dali Abashidze, the director of Niko Pirosmani Museum, there are special temperature and security systems in the museum. The entrances are not barrier-free, nor are all other functional places. She acknowledged that the museum had received one million lari (about EUR 326,000) from the Regional Development Fund with the support of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and was planning to renovate the entire site. This museum is a priority for the current government, she said. The plan is not only to renovate the museum, but also to create new content related to Niko Pirosmani and his life.[76] According to the journalistic report, the reconstruction of the Pirosmani Museum has been planned since 2015. In the reportage, the museum director hesitates to comment on the future of the museum.[77] In the Museum of Religion of Batumi, during my study tour, I found that the museum building cannot meet even the slightest need for facilities for the staff. According to Marika Motskobili, the local government has issued

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[75] "Survey on 'Towards Participatory Governance of Museums in Georgia."
[76] Abashidze, Dali. the Director of Niko Pirosmani Museum, Interview on Niko Pirosmani Museum Opportunities and Challenges, Zoom, November 8, 2021.
[77] Tsitsishvili, Liza. "Pirosmani Museum Has Been Waiting for Reconstruction," *TV Show,* Saturday Formula, April 9, 2022, https://bit.ly/3MZ2JGt.

a tender for the renovation of the premises and the construction of all necessary facilities. Construction is underway and will be completed next year.[78]

3.3. Participatory Practices in Georgia

In addition to physical access, organizational access is also an important aspect of participation. The primary directives of the Georgian museum scene are delegated from the top down. They do not apply participation as a tool of democratic governance or as a practical approach to a task. In theory, Georgian museums are indeed willing to open themselves to participation. However, from my observation, top management is not comfortable with new initiatives to transform management and/or open museums to a wider audience. The approach of not talking about challenges may be one of the characteristics of the Georgian museum sector and its management. To be aware of these processes, museum staff must be skillful and professional. The challenge of participation is an issue not only in Georgia but also in other museums of developed countries. Openness and involvement of the public are obligatory aspects of contemporary museums. Museum projects and studies that respond to this imperative have been frequent in recent years.[79]

The survey results show that Georgian museums may not be of much interest to locals due to infrastructure, exhibit content, lack of interaction with the museum, and welcoming atmosphere. When asked how often they visit a museum in Georgia, only 2.2% responded "often", 5.5% responded "never a year", 28.6% responded "more than twice a year", 11.0% responded "twice a year", 14.3% responded "once a year", 6.6% responded "twice a month", and 18.7% responded

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[78] Motskobili, Interview on Batumi Religion Museum Opportunities and Future Plans.
[79] Vestergaard Knudsen, Line. "Participation at Work in the Museum," *Museum Management and Curatorship 31*, no. 2, February 22, 2016, 193–211.

"once a month". When asked if respondents have visited the museum in other countries, 94.5% answered yes, 4.4% answered no, and 1.1% answered N/A.

It is noticeable that the Georgian population would like to visit cultural heritage institutions in general, mostly abroad; they tend not to go to local Georgian institutions. The reasons why they generally go to museums abroad are also interesting. It may be a question of access, the museum's approach, and communication; as mentioned earlier, the public usually does not feel welcome when they enter the museum space.

Access to participation was difficult during the Covid pandemic. Some of the Georgian museums offered online services, posted photos, and made online exhibitions, but most were closed. The case study museums Niko Pirosmani and the Batumi Museum of Religion were also closed; they did not have a good online presence either before or after the covid. Discussion about audiences online and offline has become popular in the museum sector and nowadays it is as important to engage audiences online as onsite. Most people find out about a museum or exhibition online. The survey also showed that most visitors get information from social media. 46.2% said they get information from social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, etc., and 24.2% said they get information from the museum website. Only 13.2% indicated that their friends or colleagues informed them. Therefore, the current challenge is to have a defined strategy for engaging people offline and online for audience engagement development.

One of the responses from MA survey referred to Batumi, where the museum itself took to the streets and held an open exhibition for the public, as not many locals go to museums. This was one of the cases where the museum felt responsible for social engagement and tried to promote its institution to the local audience."

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Many respondents highlighted the museums where they could interact with and touch the objects, sometimes putting hats on their heads, wearing clothes, and taking photos. These interactive mechanisms evoked different emotions and it was a meaningful experience for them. They also mentioned the integration of new technologies in the exhibitions, so that even the artifacts came alive with the support of technology, making the experience memorable. Other additions, such as music in the exhibition hall, helped to create an appropriate atmosphere and gave viewers a feeling that was connected to the visual part of the exhibition. One of the survey participants mentioned the exhibition of Niko Pirosmani and that the exhibition made him fall in love with this artist even more. According to Another answer about Pirosmani's exhibition in Albertina, the Viennese museum, was very emotional for the respondent.

The survey also asked visitors whether they would revisit the museum they once visited. Those who answered yes gave their reasons, primarily they go again because they enjoy art. They would like to see the exhibitions again and again, or they think that the visitor will see the objects from a different perspective at another time, or they have gone back with their friends and relatives, or they are professionally connected to the museum and visit the facilities frequently. Even though Georgian museums do not have a distinct public engagement policy and application, the public is very interested in continually discovering meaningful experiences in museums.

When respondents were asked if they would have recommended the museums they had already been to, to others, in addition to the theory of meaningful experience, the recommendations were based primarily on the personal and meaningful experience: the feeling of excitement of being a part of the institution, and/or inspiration to think about certain topics. Most respondents indicated that they recommended museums to others because they liked them and enjoyed the exhibitions and collections, and because they were inspired by particular artists or the museum environment.

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The survey found that Georgians liked the Georgian National Museum the most with 20 votes, and the Georgian National Gallery and the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum the most with six votes. It is noticeable that all respondents mentioned mainly state-funded museums and only one private museum, the Museum of Photography and Multimedia Art.

In order to make the Niko Pirosmani Museum a frequently visited place, its director, Dali Abashidze, has set herself the task of developing the museum, setting herself a deadline of two years to transform the museum and integrate modern approaches. She points out that the museum has always been open to local communities. However, their presence in decision-making is difficult to process, considering its status. The museum is a legal entity under public law and is fully funded by the state; therefore, decision-making is top-down. The director explained her plans, which aim to make the museum a frequently visited place for local and international tourists, to offer various services, and to use all the resources, spaces, and garden. As Mirzaani village has the potential to become a cultural platform and benefit the local community, Dali Abashidze would like to initiate community-based projects, art residencies, etc.[80]

The managers of many Georgian museums are concerned about the development of the local community and the role of the museum in this process. However, no surveys or research have been conducted on what the local community needs or wants and what their expectations are for the Niko Pirosmani Museum. No research has been done into why the Pirosmani Museum is an important institution for them, what benefits the museum has for them, and how they can feel part of the museum. Therefore, it is a good decision to plan promising actions to promote the village

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[80] Abashidze, Interview on Niko Pirosmani Museum Opportunities and Challenges.

and the museum itself. Neglecting the engagement and participation of the local community in shaping the new plans can be understood as a negative tone in democratic systems.

A similar situation has occurred in the Museum of Religion of Batumi. The organization belongs to the Museum Association of Adjara; therefore, the process is delegated by the top management. As mentioned above, the building is currently being renovated, but without prior consultation with the actual public. Undoubtedly, there was an urgent need to improve the infrastructure of the museum. The museum could use the exhibition space not only for permanent exhibitions but also to involve and invite local contemporary artists and to use the environment of the museum, which is an open space for performances, exhibitions, or other activities. The museum and public lacks intensive communication to identify the needs of local communities, and therefore the organizational structure, including the renovation of museum spaces, is based on the wishes of the public.

Georgian museums could learn from international practices. For example, a study by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on museum and art gallery engagement in a total of 12 organizations from the United Kingdom. In some cases, museums have understood that the focus of engagement is not to treat their community as beneficiaries, but as active partners. The study findings indicate that certain steps need to be taken, including changes in governance, encouraging "thinking outside the box," opening up to local communities and incorporating the active role of neighborhood councils, building relationships with local governments, and encouraging co-creation. Georgian museum managers can study the challenges of participatory practices in a

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country with a much longer tradition of public engagement. Fostering openness and strengthening meaningful communication are key steps in audience development.[81]

Drawing on a practice-based and ethnographic study of a participatory collaborative design process in the Danish Museum of Rock Music, Line Knudsen investigated reflexive participatory collaborative processes in museums. The symmetrical approach inspired by actor-network theory, exemplifies how the relationships between the process and the final product (e.g., digital tool or exhibition) reveal the contributions of a participatory process.[82]

Another example is the collaboratively developed project at the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, WA, which has a long history of developing exhibitions in partnership with the community. The community-led exhibit, "If Tired Hands Could Talk: Stories of Asian Pacific American Garment Workers", assembled and designed by a team of fifteen garment workers, was recognized as the best exhibit by the Western Museums Association. These were not well-trained artists, but an exhibition of personal stories. The museum was a portal to human lives.[83]

In summary, despite infrastructural and other challenges in museums, the Georgian public is very interested in museums. The opportunities to rediscover and re-experience cultural heritage overcome the other aspects of museum operations. There are museums that want to be more participatory and have initiatives, but implementation is difficult. Learning from international experiences and targeted programs can be one of the solutions for audience development.

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[81] Lynch, Bernadette. "Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and Participation in 12 Museums and Galleries in the UK",18 Queen Anne's Gate London SW1H 9AA: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2009.
[82] Vestergaard Knudsen, "Participation at Work in the Museum."
[83] Simon, "The Participatory Museum," 312-314.

3.4. Niko Pirosmani Museum and Batumi Religion Museum

This section examines participatory practices used by the two museums serving here as case studies. These cases serve as examples of state-owned museums that practice a top-down management style and have the potential to engage the public given their unique context and characteristics.

Both museums are owned by the state and located in rural areas. One is a house museum of Georgian artists with two different locations and an outdoor area; the other is a thematic museum on religion with only one exhibition space. The Niko Pirosmani Museum has two locations, one in the village of Mirzaani, where the world-famous artist was born and grew up, and another in Tbilisi, where he died in poor conditions. Niko Pirosmanashvili (1862 - 1918) was a self-taught artist who influenced the Russian avant-garde and the neo-primitivist movement.[84]

Pirosmani is a naive artist without formal art education or training. In a dynamic and organic style, he painted the everyday life of the time and described the Georgian lifestyle. His art is an example for that of naive artists, who so strongly influenced the avant-garde style. In his works, which present everyday subjects such as animals, historical paintings, traditional festivals, peasant life, and portraits, the numinous skill and personal hardships of this self-taught artist can be easily and effectively understood.[85]

Pirosmani was discovered by young Russian artists Kirill Zdanevich and Mikhail Le Dentu. After his death, public interest in his paintings grew. During the Soviet period, in 1960, the Niko Pirosmani Museum was opened. Today the institution belongs to the National Agency for the

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[84] Art Story, "Niko Pirosmani," n.d., https://www.theartstory.org/artist/pirosmani-niko/.
[85] Warren, Thais. "Completer Mystery and Marvellous Enigma of Niko Pirosmani Works", Cultural, Russian Art + Culture the World's Leading Platform for Russian Art and Cultural Events, *blog,* January 22, 2019, https://www.russianartandculture.com/complete-mystery-and-marvellous-enigma-of-niko-pirosmani-works/.

Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Georgia and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth of Georgia (see Figure 2).[86]

Figure 4 - Niko Pirosmani Museum interior, Photo by Tinatin Baghashvili, Mirzaani, 15.10.2021

The museum covers an area of 5.4 hectares with the main exhibition hall, the birthplace of Niko Pirosmani, several wine cellars, and a courtyard. The museum houses 11 358 items, including Niko's 14 original painting and Pablo Picasso's original portrait of Niko Pirosmani.[87]

The museum is popular because of the artist and his paintings. The museum's development vision and organizational strategy are not publicly available. When asked about the target audience, the director mentioned programs for school children and that the museum is often visited by international tourists. In addition, the museum manages the small space in Tbilisi, the cellar where the artist died. In her interview, the museum director Dali Abashidze underlines that despite the two locations, the management is not difficult.[88]

[86] Georgian National Heritage Agency, "List of the Monuments at the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia," n.d., https://www.heritagesites.ge/uploads/files/61b0caa366b56.pdf.
[87] "Official Webpage of Niko Pirosmani."
[88] Abashidze, Interview on Niko Pirosmani Museum Opportunities and Challenges.

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Figure 5 - Artist's House at Niko Pirosmani Museum, photo by Tinatin Baghashvili, Mirzaani, 15.10.2021

Figure 6 - Exhibition Hall at Niko Pirosmani Museum, Photo by Tinatin Baghashvili, Mirzaani, 15.10.2021

The museum does not have its own website, only a Facebook page. On the Facebook page, the last post at the time of today's observation (January 12, 2023) was published on May 4, 2020. Therefore, the museum is also not active on social media to reach an audience. Considering its location, the museum has tremendous potential to use the entire open space for various events to engage the public. It can also boost local tourism and bring people to Mirzaani village.

The second case is the Museum of Religion of Batumi, founded by a private person, Teimuraz Komakhidze, in 2004, on September 17. Originally, the building was to serve as an Orthodox church; later it was transformed into a religious museum. The Adjara region is multicultural and multiethnic, located near the Turkish border, and has many Muslims. Batumi has established itself as a tolerant city and has become a hometown for more than 80 different nations. Therefore, the Museum of Religion of Batumi is a successful and good example of tolerance and cultural differences. The museum belongs to the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, under the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, and is a member of the recently established

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Association of Museums of Adjara (see Figure 2). The organization is very small and employs only three people.

The main structure depends on the administration of the Museum Association, including finances, legal affairs, etc. The museum has only one exhibition room where religious themes, icons, religious books, paintings, sculptures, etc. are presented. Like the Niko Pirosmani Museum, it has no organizational strategy or vision for audience development. Here, too, various events are held. However, they do not define target groups.[89] The museum does not have a website, only a Facebook page, and according to the latest data (January 12, 2023), the last post was published on June 28, 2017. Therefore, the museum is not active in the digital space. It lacks communication with the public via the internet. The Batumi Museum of Religion, a symbol of tolerance and a multi-religious region, has a great opportunity to play a social role and gather people, educate them, and create social good.

The survey explored the motivations of audiences visiting museums to analyze what participatory practices can be applied in the Georgian museum context. 49.5% of respondents primarily wanted to see the new exhibition, 22% wanted to be amused and entertained, and 14.3% wanted to learn more about Georgian culture. Only a very small number of people said they were visiting the museum for research purposes. When asked why they visited museums abroad, most (92.3%) answered that they were interested in the culture and history of another country. Museums offer visitors the opportunity to gain knowledge about a specific country, while in Georgia the reasons for visiting museums are different. Mostly they visit museums when there is a new exhibition. In the Niko Pirosmani Museum in Mirzaani, there are often exhibitions of international and local

[89] Motskobili, Interview on Batumi Religion Museum Opportunities and Future Plans.

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artists.[90] It is possible for visitors to see the new exhibitions, but due to the long distance of two-hour drive to the village, this is not very convenient. The survey also emphasized the importance of a good location. There were differences between the museums in Tbilisi and in the countryside, outside the capital. Museums in the countryside do not provide additional services to keep visitors for a long time, as visitors usually have a maximum of one hour to view the exhibition. Thus, if the museum is far from Tbilisi, visitors will not go there to see the permanent exhibition. In addition, regional museums do not offer varied exhibitions and/or content, nor do they offer food or entertainment options. In the Batumi Museum of Religion, there is only one permanent exhibition at a time, and the door is not open to other artists. There are also public events related only to religion.[91]

Few state museums have cafes, libraries, and stores. When asked if the public ever used additional services at the museum, such as the vault, library, stores, etc., 65.9% said they did, 27.5% said they did not, and 6.6% could not recall. Georgian audiences would likely go to museum cafes and stores or use the additional services offered there. This allows the museum sector to open and be more economically flexible, as well as be modernized and offer food and entertainment options to visitors. The need for customers is obvious, but the museum sector does not seem to be very active in this regard. Interviews with the directors of the case study museums, Dali Abashidze and Marika Motskobili, indicate that they have already considered expanding services. Both museums are under reconstruction and are the focus of local and national government interest, so there is a good chance that these services and values will be brought to bear in the new spaces.

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[90] Abashidze, Interview on Niko Pirosmani Museum Opportunities and Challenges.
[91] Motskobili, Interview on Batumi Religion Museum Opportunities and Future Plans.

Figure 7 - Batumi Religion Museum, https://georgiantravelguide.com/ka/davit-komakhidzis-religiuri-muzeumi

Figure 8 - Religion Museum Interion, photo by Marika Motskobili, before renovation, 2021.

In conclusion, the study of public engagement has shown that it is a form of museum communication. It is a complex and ongoing process that requires the involvement of museum

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management and the public. The chapter showed that people in Georgia enjoy going to museums, although they face some challenges during their visits, such as the museums' layout and atmosphere, infrastructure, distance, etc. The chapter explored participatory models and practices. Georgian people face challenges of participation in museums; top management shows a willingness to promote public engagement, including the executives of the case study museums. The chapter argues that there is a need to raise awareness of the importance of participation as one of the pillars of the sector's development, and a need to train museum professionals in audience development.

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Chapter 4. Professional Traineeship Programs on Participatory Approaches for Museums

As part of the MA work, the survey highlighted the need to train Georgian museum staff to make cultural heritage organizations more participatory. Survey participants highlighted aspects that museums lack and that system changes are needed to meet the highest standards.

The following chapter provides an overview of international best practices for museum staff training and mechanisms that positively impact the museum sector. The chapter analyzes the importance of staff training in Georgian museums and presents tools that facilitate participation. It is critical for the development of the sector to have well-trained staff who understand the need for public participation. Therefore, this chapter presents a training module (see the Annex) for museum practitioners that focuses on audience development and participation. The training module has the potential to serve as a practical capacity-building tool for museum facilities. It can be conducted independently by museum staff or be a module for training professionals.

4.1. The International Experience in Running the Museum Professional Trainings

As discussed in previous chapters, museums are connected to the public. They can influence audiences with the narrative they produce, they can convey a strong message, and they can be used as propaganda tools. Museum operations require well-trained staff and top management who understand the current challenges and have a vision of how museums can position themselves to create social good. Lack of international collaboration and top-down systems strain the flexibility and critical thinking of museum staff. As a result, staff lack the motivation to initiate and sometimes are not even happy working in museums. Museum leaders need to provide their staff with opportunities for professional development, participation in international programs, and

building collaborations with museum organizations, expanding their network and encouraging their engagement and performance.

There are leading museum organizations that provide various types of professional development for museum staff internationally. NEMO (Network of European Museums Organizations), ICOM (International Council of Museums), MUSA (Museum Sector Alliance), Museum Next, UNESCO, American Alliance of Museums, and many more. As the understanding of museum institutions has recently changed and audiences have become a core value for them, museum attitudes and management have changed accordingly. Most recently, on May 9, 2022, ICOM published two new audience-centered definitions of museums.[92] Both proposals emphasize the importance of the audience and its active participation. Therefore, understanding audiences and their needs has become essential for museums.

Last year, NEMO participated in the training course "From Audience to People - A Journey for Changemakers." The training focused on people-centered issues and audience development. During the meetings, there were training sessions using the ACED methodology and steps, which gave participants the space to identify their audience and their needs. Based on this, they were then able to develop individual strategies.[93] The ACED model is intended to encourage cultural organizations to be closer to their communities. It can be one of the models that can be used in the Georgia museum context. It helps the museum or any cultural organization team to develop creative ideas while following human-centered design. The model can be transferred and adopted by cultural heritage organizations. It focuses on different stages of strengthening public

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[92] NEMO, "ICOM Publishes Two Museum Definition Proposals," May 16, 2022, https://www.ne-mo.org/news/article/nemo/icom-publishes-two-museum-definition-proposals.html.
[93] "NEMO Members Got to Join an Online Training Course on Audience Development," October 16, 2021, https://www.ne-mo.org/news/article/nemo/nemo-members-got-to-join-an-online-training-course-on-audience-development.html.

engagement by engaging museum staff and similar organizations to develop new ideas that encourage participation, create and test prototypes, and, if they work well, embeds the practices within the organization.[94] Exploration of the Georgian museum scene revealed that organizations have not defined audiences. Therefore, the application of different models, including ACED, can be useful for audience development.

The same approaches were developed by the Museum Next organization. The platform offers not only interesting articles but also useful tools and documents for museum practitioners to qualify. They focus on audience development and the impact of digital presentations on audiences. "Audience development is a topic that all museums need to address if they want to succeed. After all, growing audiences and cultivating advocacy are key to the long-term cultural impact."[95]

Museum Next founders Jasper Visser and Jim Richardson have produced a strategy paper for "Digital Engagement in Culture, Heritage and the Arts." The authors call digital engagement important for modern cultural organizations because it is a way to promote and place them in the marketplace. It's true that in social media and the digital world, audiences are part of the museum process; they can message you directly or comment, like or dislike your posts. Their attitude helps you to orient and change. Therefore, the bottom-up approach is well integrated when used for the benefit of the museum.[96] Graham Black says, that participatory digital engagement and content sharing are now integral to the lives, behaviors, and experiences of modern museum users-and they impact the overall museum experience both onsite and online. It has profound implications

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[94] ADESTE + webpage, "Explore the ACED Model", Cultural, n.d., https://aced.adesteplus.eu/explore.
[95] Deakin, Tim. "Understanding the Essential Role of Progressive Social Engagement in Successful Audience Development," Museum Next, May 3, 2022, https://www.museumnext.com/article/understanding-the-essential-role-of-progressive-social-engagement-in-successful-audience-development/.
[96] Visser, Jasper, and Richardson, Jim. "Digital Engagement in Cultural, Heritage and the Arts", ed. Jemma Bowman, *Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license.,* 2013, https://www.asimetrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Digital_engagement_in_culture_heritage_and_the_arts.1.pdf.

for people's expectations of museums, now and in the future, and is driving demand for personalized, immersive, and shareable experiences - at a time and place that fits.[97]

A strategy for the organization that sets out the goals, vision, and mission of the organization, as well as the focus of its activities, helps with structural work. Georgian museums generally do not have an organizational strategy, including a separate strategy for museum audience development. When asked if the Batumi Museum of Religion has a strategy that defines the vision and mission of the organization, the response was that the museum does not have a strategy. The organization operates under the Association of Museums of Adjara and all museums, regardless of their thematic focus and types, follow the very general guidelines. The museum director of Niko Pirosmani mentioned that she has the document and follows the main principles, but from her answer, it was clear that the new changes she is planning due to the new funding from the Prime Minister's Office are not even mentioned in the document.[98] Moreover, the document is not accessible on any online platform. As described in the previous chapter, both museums have low visibility in online media and have the capacity to expand it further.

The strategy presented by Jasper Wisser and Jim Richardson not only focuses on audiences but also instructs museum leaders on defining the core values from which people should visit their museums and their place in the competitive market. On the other hand, defining the audience and gathering information about what the museum knows about that audience, what the challenges are in engaging that audience, and what the reasons may be for visitors not going to the museum are critical. They highlight the goals for the digital engagement strategy and the channels through which museums are implementing the strategy. They also encourage museum leaders to study the

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[97] Black, "Museums and the Challenge of Change," 44.
[98] Abashidze, Interview on Niko Pirosmani Museum Opportunities and Challenges.

broader trends in this area to ensure their actions are timely and meet current needs and expectations.[99] The museums' reach now extends around the world, due to globalization and online engagement. This means a vast new audience to address. It also means that each museum is competing on a semi-global stage. Museums are accessed not only through the front door but also through search engine results pages and website home pages, while 'meeting the information needs of online visitors' has become an important part of the work of museum professionals. Many websites, regardless of country of origin, now include an English language element to reach an audience globally.[100]

Other capacity-building programs for museum professional development are regularly organized by ICOM. There are several directions within the capacity building: International Training Center for Museum Studies (ICOM - ITC), regional training, exchange programs, online training, and ICOM-IMREC, a research-based activity.[101]

In conclusion, there are other organizations that are gradually implementing various projects at the local and international levels to support the development of museum professions so that today's employees have the appropriate training and skills to be flexible and productive for institutions. There are not many opportunities for Georgian museum staff, nor are there professional supporting documents. To address the issues explored above, this paper presents a training module for museum practitioners.

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[99] Visser, Richardson. "Digital Engagement in Culture, Heritage and the Arts," 19-20.
[100] Visser, Richardson. "Digital Engagement in Culture, Heritage and the Arts," 37.
[101] ICOM, "ICOM-IMREC" About the Research Program, n.d., https://icom.museum/en/our-actions/capacity-building/icom-imrec/.

4.2. Training Module for Museum Practitioners on Participative Practices

The training module can serve as a basis for self-guided development for museum management and staff, as well as a training module delivered by professionals. It can also be adapted according to the occasion, type of museum, location, scope, etc. The training module is in the thesis appendix. Initially it was created in English, but I plan to translate it into Georgian and make the digital version freely available to anyone interested. The examination of the historical and political context in the previous chapters has shown that participation in the museum is complex and important. Staff must have appropriate opportunities to develop their professional skills and be contemporary. The training module can be a useful tool to facilitate participation in the museum by engaging museum staff. The practices can be relevant to all Georgia museums given their context and scope.

The document focuses on the key aspects of public engagement in museums and cultural heritage organizations. It highlights the key principles for museum operations and skills development for museum staff to understand organizational concepts and management. It is very important that every museum employee understands, respects and works professionally with the values and importance of the museum. The ICOM Code of Ethics also emphasizes that museums should operate professionally and follow the law. Therefore, museum staff must be aware of these professional and legal requirements and understand the value that museums create.[102]

Since most museums in Georgia have no idea who their audience is or how to define it, the document includes relevant questions and tasks to clarify this question. Any cultural heritage organization, according to well-structured organizational management, needs an audience for its

[102] ICOM, "Code of Ethics of ICOM," 41-44.

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work. To reach the audience, communication is an important process. Most Georgian museums have either websites or social media. The case study museums presented do not have their own websites. The Niko Pirosmani Museum has a subpage of the Georgian National Museum and a Facebook channel, while the Museum of Religion in Batumi has a subpage of the Association of Museums of Adjara but no social media channel, but an account registered under the same name that is outdated. Both museums need to expand their digital presence to keep up with developments in the modern museum world. They need an online presence to attract a potential audience because sometimes a well-promoted online presence grabs the audience's attention and brings people to the museums.

In addition, the training module will present a SWOT analysis related to public engagement in the museum. There will be open-ended questions such as what are the successful events that promote public engagement, what needs to be developed to bring people to the museum more often, etc. The SWOT analysis will present the main aspects of engagement and their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.[103]

Georgian museums do not usually conduct surveys that help them understand what the public thinks, likes and dislikes. All respondents confirmed that research in the museum sector, including audience development and engagement research, and conducting relevant surveys are not very popular in Georgia. In the survey analysis, respondents highlighted that they sometimes feel a bit of an outsider and distance themselves from museum institutions, not even feeling welcome there. At the same time, direct communication and involvement of the public is a social obligation for

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[103] Kenton, Will. "Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis," *Investopedia,* 2021, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/swot.asp.

every museum. They should be in close contact with their audiences to set the agenda for tomorrow's development.

When Lori Fogarty introduced the topic of museums and community and the power of museums to change lives at TEDx, she referenced several projects that were created because the local community took an interest. She emphasized how "I" morphed into the term "WE" and that the public took ownership of the museum, which was a success for the Oakland Museum. On the other hand, she said that a museum is a space that connects people and acts as a social platform.[104]

Therefore, bringing people closer together to unite them with the goal is one of the key elements of the organization. As part of the module, museum staff will be tasked with conducting a survey to determine their actual target audience, who is visiting and/or accessing their online platforms, who are engaged, and what issues the public is thinking about. Based on the results, museum staff needs to think about how to offer creative solutions, such as a themed exhibit on pollution, success stories, and so on. The museum should become a place of inspiration and discovery. Within the organization, it is important to involve employees in decision-making and brainstorming processes. Sometimes top management does not have the capacity or is busy with other organizational matters. The staff team can come up with creative and actionable ideas in a variety of ways to meet the needs of the audience and solve some of the problems visitors face during their visit. One of the parts will deal with the design thinking approach, which is understood as a problem-solving process that starts with understanding the needs of the customer.[105] The final

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[104] Fogarty, "How Museums Can Change Lives."
[105] MIT, Management Executive Education, "Mastering Design Thinking - Definition and Program Description," n.d., https://executive-ed.mit.edu/mastering-design-thinking?utm_source=Google&utm_network=g&utm_medium=c&utm_term=design%20thinking&utm_location=9062727&utm_campaign=B-365D_T2_GG_SE_MDT_Core&utm_content=Design_Thinking&gclid=Cj0KCQjwspKUBhCvARIsAB2IYusQL25CauONVHeI3GF5f7bbahiGdcoZcXuEjNZiSTUh33dQz8dTtCgaAvvVEALw_wcB.

phase would be brainstorming and planning for implementation by museum professionals. The implementation process includes the description of project goals, team and action plan structures, and the timeline and templates for budgeting. The training module can be initially tested in the case study museums Niko Pirosmani Museum and Batumi Religion Museum, considering their small structures, and later elaborated and/or developed as needed.

This chapter presented the international best practices for museum staff training and mechanisms that have a positive impact on the museum sector. The ACED model was presented as one of the models applicable to Georgian museums, Museum Next materials, developing a communication strategy, and determining audiences. Also, the professional development opportunities for museum practitioners offered by ICOM were mentioned. The chapter analyzed the importance of the professional development of Georgian museum staff and described some of the tools that can promote audience development. It gave an overview of the training module that can serve as self-directed material. The outreach tools are universally applicable, and the Georgian context can be appropriately integrated and designed accordingly. Moreover, the tools provide the users with a deep understanding of the audience and their identification. It also creates opportunities for idea generation and museum staff involvement, as well as open interaction between top management and staff, and supports design thinking. The toolkit is placed in the thesis Appendix. Ultimately, the module helps museum practitioners deepen their understanding of the importance of public engagement and contributes to audience development.

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Conclusion

This MA thesis demonstrated the study of participation in Georgian museums. To conceptualize the results, the thesis examined the historical circumstances and their influence on the institutionalization process of the museums in the country. It described some of the public initiatives as a means of participation in the development of the sector and presented the early Georgian museum institutions. It gave an overview of the stages of development of Georgian museums in the 20th and 21st centuries, highlighting events that played an important role in shaping the administrative structures: the first democratic republic of Georgia in 1918-1921, the period of Soviet occupation and its strong influence on cultural processes, independence after 1991 and the Rose Revolution, reforms in the field, and the establishment of museum associations. The study showed that the development of museums was a long process involving people and politics. When Georgia gained its independence, the public actively participated in museum processes. It became clear that historical events have the power to highlight the activities and involvement of the public, but that this is also closely linked to the politics of the country.

The next chapter provided an analysis of the various policies on participation at the national and international levels. This chapter examined the challenges and opportunities of the museum sector in Georgia. It analyzed participation practices in relation to policy documents and presented different approaches that contribute to engagement. In the 1950s, the fundamental right of people to participate in cultural life was promoted by UN policies. Since then, many non-governmental and international organizations have begun to work to strengthen cultural representation and cooperation. The supporting activities were carried out by international professional organizations such as UNESCO, ICOM, etc., which highlighted the importance of museum institutions to national identity and heritage preservation. Museums became symbols linking the past with the

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future in the present. The study of various international documents such as the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics, the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention 2005), and the report UN on participatory governance in the field of cultural heritage have shown that the general standards for museum participation are not yet integrated with Georgian museums. Following international tendencies, Georgian state policies have supported participation in museums since 2001. For example, the State Law on Museums describes the importance of social engagement and participation, and the Cultural Strategy 2025 (2016) devotes a separate chapter to cultural heritage and museum sector development. The thesis examined the state's vision of a participatory policy and highlighted the challenges of forgetting this policy by the Georgian government itself. This chapter also examined the situation of museum staff. Government policies should support not only the public but also museum staff by paying them a decent salary, providing opportunities for professional development and training, and promoting international collaborations and networks. Interpreting the policy cycle in relation to the Georgian museum scene revealed the importance of communication between key stakeholders.

The study of public participation in Georgian museums has shown that existing policies support the engagement and active participation of people in museums, although practice at the level of museum management needs more support.

The thesis explored the perceptions of Georgian audiences on how participative museums are, and, based on an online survey (91 respondents), examined the results in relation to the challenges and opportunities of the Georgian museum sector. The hypothesis that the lack of organizational management approaches affects museum visitor engagement, that visitors do not feel engaged and do not return frequently, was confirmed by the survey analysis and key findings. Respondents were not satisfied with museum services and did not perceive a welcoming atmosphere; this

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included infrastructural difficulties, but also the unfriendly attitude of the staff. However, visitors tend to visit the museums in Georgia and abroad quite frequently. Sometimes they revisit the museums and recommend them to others. On the other hand, the analysis of the interviews with the museum representatives and the directors of the case study museums revealed a positive attitude towards the willingness to further open the museum doors to the public.

The thesis also addressed online participation, since it is a crucial part of museum activities, especially after Covid. Most respondents indicated that they get new information from the internet, museum websites, or social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. The study found that the online presence of Georgian museums still has much potential for development. The analysis showed that online presence is one of the ways to engage the public nowadays and Georgian museums need to strengthen this aspect. Participatory practices in Georgian museums were analyzed based on Nina Simon's participation models and explored the benefits that public engagement can have for museum institutions. Opening doors can bring the community together, and developing a sense of co-creation can also foster creative processes in the museum. It also enhances the quality of democracy and supports social development. The models of participation differ from each other. The thesis presented models of collaboration, contribution, co-creation, and hosting.

The study presented international participatory practices that promote community participation, including in museum exhibitions. These examples can be easily applied to the Georgian context and support the further development of the sector.

There is a need for museum development; it includes infrastructural development, strengthening policy application in museum processes, strengthening public engagement, and increasing transparency of museum work, supporting museums' online presence and constant communication

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with the public, raising awareness of the importance of museums for social benefit and community development. All these aspects are crucial. One of the most important aspects is the training of museum staff to support the development of the whole sector. For this reason, the thesis studied professional training programs for participatory approaches for museums at the international level. The model ACED was presented, which helps cultural organizations to determine their target audience and start communication with them. It also explored the possibilities of the Museum Next organization and the definition of the strategy for museums as the main indicator of success. Digital engagement strategy documents created by Jasper Wisser and Jim Richardson were analyzed, showing the importance for museums to have a vision for public engagement. The case study museums do not have a strategy, and it was clear from the interviews that the processes depend on the circumstances and lack a structural vision for institutional development, including public engagement. For many museums around the world, the ICOM program provides capacity-building opportunities. These participation practices and tools are modern and universal. Georgian museums can support these practices in their daily work.

Finally, based on the study of international practices and sectoral needs, this MA thesis focused on small Georgian state museums offered a training module that can be easily tested and developed. A self-guided training module was developed that can be adapted and modified according to the needs and content of the museum. It can be used by professionals and/or by museum staff. The training module includes tools to facilitate participation in museum organizations by involving museum practitioners in the process: analyzing the organization, its vision, and target audience, creating customer and organizational profiles, market segmentation, understanding communication channels, and SWOT in terms of public participation, audience survey template, design thinking and defining new initiatives, action planning, and budget. It

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encourages museum staff to be creative and engaged in operations so that they feel valued and deepen their understanding of audience engagement for audience development. This training module is attached below as an Appendix and will be published online as an open resource.

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Appendices

Table I

Grouping the responses from the survey on what audience likes and dislikes about visiting museums in Georgia	
Question: What do you like the most about visiting museums in Georgia?	**Question: What do you dislike the most about visiting museums in Georgia?**
Environment and the museum space	Lack of content in the exhibition narrative and object alignment
Objects, old relics, the feeling of heritage	Format of the exhibitions, for example - Parjiani exhibition
Gold Fund and Georgian treasury at the Simon Janashia National Museum	Lack of digitalization and online presence, as well as digital services
The opportunity to learn something new from the exhibitions	Soviet mentality, discrimination, and the need for change
Connection to the Georgian history based on the collections	Cafes, toilettes, and shops are not often well organized
Museum architecture and buildings, Infrastructure, including lighting	Infrastructure and non-modern buildings and lighting
Fewer number visitors and free space, peace in the museum	Lack of collection and exposition content, including interpretation
New exhibitions	Lack of museums being closed institutions and not collaborating with other organizations
Information on the museum walls and interaction	Lack of freedom during the experiencing exhibition because of the staff members
Qualified guides at museums	Lack of professionalism of museum guides, that they do not interpret stories, they only tell the facts
Museum staff enthusiasm	Lack of motivation of the staff and their mood or not nice interaction

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Aura and old objects	Aura, more attention to the visitors and welcoming attitudes are needed
Saddle and armor for women and their representation	Museum management is not easily accessible to the community
Locations	Propagandist content and the translations are not valid
Content and details	Museum service overall in a very poor condition
	Programs for school children
	Museum ticket price
	Few visitors and silence
	Lack of research processes at the museums
	Non-adapted infrastructure for disabled people, lack of guidance in different languages
	Lack of newness and lack of social spaces
	Lack of innovative approaches
	Little budget for museums and their development
	Municipal museum promotion and commercialization

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TRAINING MODULE ON PARTICIPATORY PRACTICIES DEVELOPMENT FOR MUSEUM PRACTITIONERS

The document is created in the framework of the MA thesis project "Participatory Practices in the Museums of Georgia" by Tinatin Baghashvili

MA program of Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management

Central European University

Vienna, 2023

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"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."- ICOM, 2022

CONTENT

The training module involves the museum institution and its staff, it fosters organizational commitment and aims to promote audience development and participatory practices.

The document:

- Develops critical and creative thinking for museum practitioners.
- Develops relevant approaches to current issues in museums by museum staff.
- Deepens the understanding of the importance of audiences in museums.
- Provides a framework for developing new imaginative ideas for audience engagement.
- Promotes collaboration and trust among museum staff.
- Develops communication skills.
- Stimulates creative approaches to audience engagement and related organizational analysis.
- Develops project management skills and implementation.

UNDERSTANDING MUSEUM ORGANIZATION

Name of your museum _____

How long you have been working at this museum, did you have any proud moments connected to your museum, or did you have any shame while working there? Please, write down the main values that your museum institution creates:

Write them down in a couple of sentences

_____

_____

_____

What is your museum's mission and aims, have you heard about them? Please, write them down.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Is it visible to everyone, outsiders? Yes __ No __

Is it visible on the museum webpage? Yes __ No __

What are the services your museum offers, such as exhibitions, open events, lectures, shops, etc. White them down _____

_____

_____

_____

Where is your museum located? _____

How many people work at your museum? And do you know all of them? _____

Do you know what your museum budget is annually? _____

UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE OF YOUR MUSEUM

For any kind of cultural heritage organization, the public and its engagement are essential, and so are museums. They cannot survive without visitors; museums are the organizations that unite society on both sides of the operation. On one side, it shows and tells people's stories, and on the other side, the museum shows those stories to people.

To be a successful museum, the top and middle management of the institution must know who the target audience is.

The audience is for every organization in today's world:

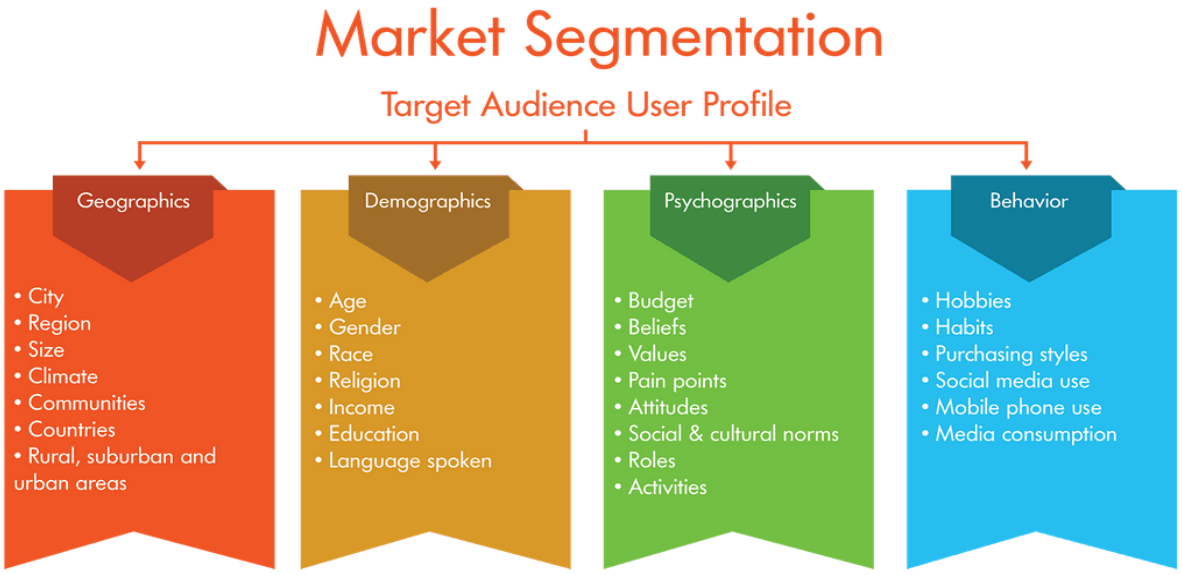
Offline Audience (who physically visit the museum)	Online Audience (who engage through online channels)
Existing Audience (Who already go to the museum)	Potential Audience (Who has not gone yet, but can be reached through promotions)
Local Audience (who live nearby the museum, your community, city, region, and a country)	International Audience (Tourists from different countries around the world)

Have you ever thought about your museum audience? Who are they? Yes ___ No ___

*Elaborate*_____
_____
_____
_____

In the following task, you can identify the target audience based on geography, demographics, psychology, and behavior. Koss Morris in his article "Target Audience: a key factor for business" presents the definition of target audience - it is a group that is most likely to buy/pay for the goods and services offered. In the museum context, it is the people who come to use museum services and pay for the admission ticket.[106]

Who is the target audience of your museum, and who do you see frequently in your museum? According to the market segmentation, please write down each of the aspects for your audience.



[106]Morris, Kos. "Target Audience: A Key Factor for Business," *Tap link*, n.d., https://taplink.at/en/blog/target_audience_definition_types_and_examples.html.

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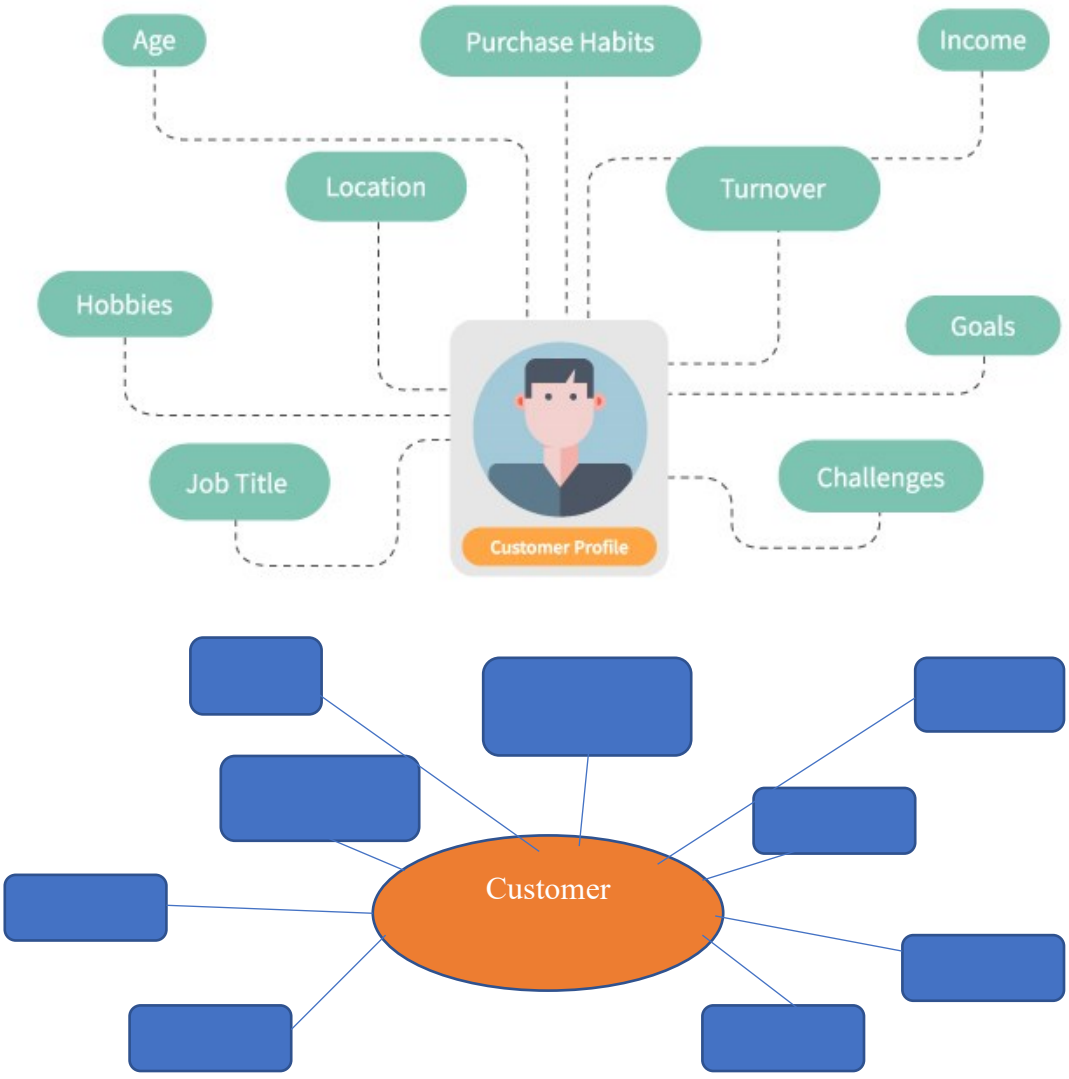
You can create a profile of your customers that includes specific details about them. Using this model, you can determine who your actual target audience is. Sometimes it is said that museums are for everyone. But think about your own museum: do you see every age group coming to the museum? Do you see people from all countries coming there? Are the people who visit the museum all the same, with the same understanding and taste? To meet the needs of visitors, you first need to find out which people visit your museum.

In the following photo you can see the main detailed information published on the Hard Wear Promo website.[107]



[107] Hard Wear Promotions, "Using Customer Profiles to Find the Perfect Promo Products," May 3, 2021, https://www.hardwearpromo.com/blog/using-customer-profiles-to-find-the-perfect-promo-products.

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COMMUNICATION & CHANNELS

Nowadays, all organizations must implement communication processes, otherwise they will be hidden and will not have enough customers to sustain themselves. The same is true for museums, because since they work for people, they need to communicate to attract visitors to the museum space, to see the exhibit, and/or to revisit it. Most large museums have separate communications teams responsible for indirect and direct communications, and staff in various positions covering media and digital communications. Today, not only is direct communication profitable, but online presence and digital visibility also help a museum grow its audience. To analyze your museum communication, consider some of the following aspects.

Does your museum have a team dedicated to working on communications?	
Does your museum have a webpage?	
Does your museum use any social media channels? If yes, please write to the social media channels.	
How often does the museum post anything new in the media? (Including webpage, social media, or any reportage from broadcast media)	
Does your museum have an official email?	
Does your museum send newsletters and press releases?	
Does your museum have any media partners? Or has it had any previously for any project or event?	
Does your museum respond to people's emails, comments, and correspondence in time?	
Do you collect information from your audience, or have you done any audience survey?	
When the museum has an event, what are the platforms to promote news?	

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SWOT ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION IN THE MUSEUM

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning process for organizations to identify key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It helps organizations put themselves in the shoes of others and assess what can be done better. If we think of museums and do the analysis SWOT of how museums engage people, what are the strengths of museums that engage audiences, what are the weaknesses, opportunities, and threats - it will create a general overview of audience engagement in the museum. The analysis needs to be done with input from the museum's upper and middle management, and all parties should be honest. It can reveal interesting possibilities that museum management may not have thought of. Take a sheet of paper and use the boxes for brainstorming.

Strength	**Weakness**
Opportunities	**Threats**

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SURVEY TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE MUSEUM STAFF

The training module was used to gather the opinions and ideas of museum employees. Now it is time to approach the actual audience and conduct a small survey among museum staff. Task: think about the method you will use to conduct the survey of your audience (audience means the actual visitors who come to your museum). There are several methods:

1. You can create an online survey form and send it out to your customers via a newsletter.
2. You can post the online survey on your museum website and social media.
3. You can print out the questionnaire and ask museum visitors questions directly and record them in audio or written form.

Possible questions for the survey, to the audience who has just visited your museum:

- Full name, email, telephone, gender, age, marital status, location, education level, profession, place of work (please add if you think of more)
- Is it the first time you to visit our museum?
- If not, how many times have you been here?
- How did you receive information about our museum?
- What is the purpose of your visit?
- How do you like our museum space, do you feel the good atmosphere here?
- Do you feel that you are part of the museum, or do you feel like an outsider?
- How do you think, does our museum reflect contemporary issues, and if not, why?
- How much time did you spend at our museum?
- What was most you like about our museum?
- What was most you dislike most about our museum?
- Will you recommend our museum to others?
- Will you follow us on social media and recommend our museum there?
- What kind of events would you like our museum to organize, and what are the topics that our museum should reflect on?
- Is it fine if we send you newsletters to your Email?
- Do you agree that we will use your responses to form our future activity?

*The questions present a draft version, and it can be adjusted according to the museum staff's ideas

**Timeframe for conducting a survey is also dependent on the museum staff ideas and survey scope

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KEY FINDINGS AND PROBLEM IDEATION

After the survey, the museum staff collects and evaluates the responses. There may be very positive and negative feedback. The museum should focus on what the public says about what they do not like and what they would like to improve and/or what kind of events the public would like to see at the museum, etc.

Please write down what are the main issues that bother your audience.

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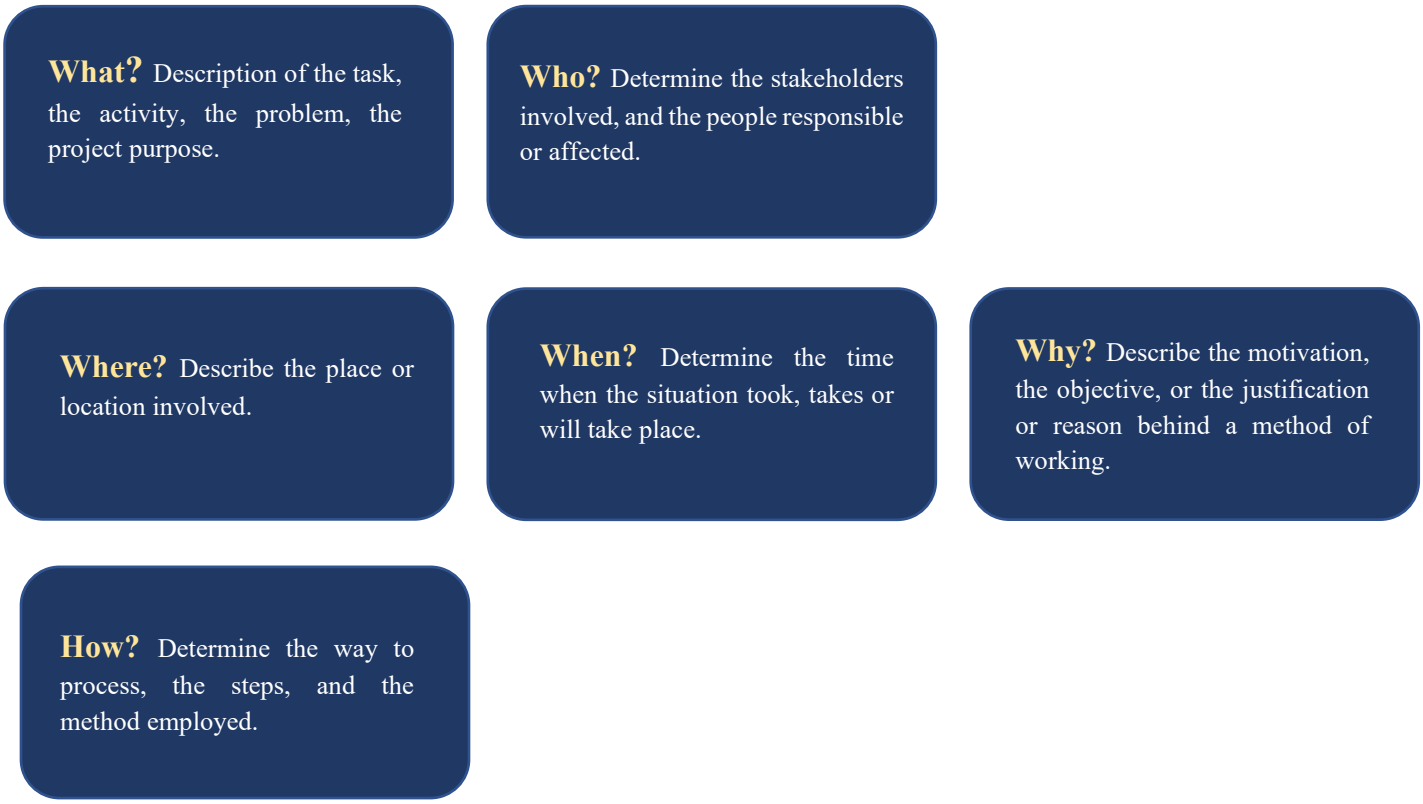
DESIGN THINKING AND INITIATIVES

The problems can be solved with creative thinking, and design thinking is one of the methods where the problems are transformed into opportunities and new ideas are born. The new startup world works with this concept, and we will use the same approach in the museum field. After identifying the main concerns of the audience, the museum staff will jointly conduct an ideation session, i.e., a brainstorming session to think about what problem to focus on and how to solve it or at least change it for the better. The whole process has something to do with participatory governance, as the core idea is to ask people and then create something that benefits society. For a better illustration, the 5W1H method can be used here. 5W1H is the acronym that summarizes the following six questions: What? Who? Where? When? Why? How? It is a systematic series of questions that collect all the information needed to solve the problem and carry out the action.[108]



The 5W1H method is usually used in journalism, but it can also be a useful tool for the idea generation process in museums.

[108] Humanperf Blog, "#Now Understand Glossary: The 5W1H Method," May 3, 2018, https://www.humanperf.com/en/blog/nowiunderstand-glossary/articles/5W1H-method.

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PLEASE WRITE ANSWERS TO EACH OF THE QUESTIONS AND COME UP WITH ONE IDEA THAT ADDRESSES TO THE AUDIENCE NEED AND /OR PROBLEM (it can be a project, an event, an intervention of small or large scale, an infrastructural change, etc.)

WHAT

WHO

WHERE

WHEN

WHY

HOW

Based on your text, please formulate what is the aim of your idea and/or project and please specify team members from your museum and their roles in the new idea/project

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ACTION PLAN AND TIMELINE

For an idea, you need a set of actions that will help you plan how to achieve the end goal. Therefore, this template can structure your actions in terms of time periods and identify the person responsible. You can use this form to create a script for your project implementation.

N	ACTION	TIMELINE (please identify the period when the action will happen)	RESPONSIBLE PERSON FROM THE MUSEUM	COMMENT

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BUDGET

The project/idea needs a certain budget to be realized. This template will help you determine the cost and revenue side. In the "Cost" column, the user can enter each item needed for the project implementation, the cost per item (based on small market research) and the quantity of items needed. In the fourth column, you can specify the total budget and the source from which you want to receive the money. In the "Revenue" column, enter only the items that will generate revenue for your project and museums. This can be any crowdfunding activity, sale, exhibition, etc.

ITEM	Cost per Item	N of items	Total Budget	Source of the budget

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