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Editorial

Culture Faultlines: Management, Entrepreneurship, and Heritage

Guest Editors
Silviu ANGHEL[1], Magdalena SAWCZUK[2]
[1] University of Bucharest
4-12 Regina Elisabeta Blvd, 030018 Bucharest, Romania
ORCID No. 0009-0007-6951-5618; silviuanghel2011@yahoo.com
[2] Jagiellonian University in Krakow
Łojasiewicza 4, 30-348, Kraków, Poland
ORCID No. 0000-0003-2882-1081; m.sawczuk@uj.edu.pl

Cultural organizations occupy a paradoxical position in contemporary society: they must be managed like any other organization, yet they answer to a logic fundamentally different from that of the market. Lately, they have been at a crossroads.

For instance, in the case of museums, as the International Council of Museums defines them, they are non-profit, permanent institutions tasked with acquiring, preserving, researching, and exhibiting heritage "in the service of society and its development," not in the service of shareholders. This creates what economists have long identified as a structural anomaly: museums typically face a demand curve that sits below their average cost curve, meaning ticket revenue alone could never cover their operations. Frey and Meier's (2006) economic analysis of museums shows that this is precisely why the non-profit form dominates the sector in Europe and the United States, not as an accident of history, but as an institutional response to a service that produces externalities (educational value, civic identity, the "option value" of future visits, the simple existence value of preserved heritage) that markets cannot price. The organization chart, the budget cycle, and the efficiency audit are real, but they are instruments serving a mission whose output is cultural meaning rather than profit.

This managerial structure, however, does not exempt museums, theaters, or other cultural organizations from the disciplines of entrepreneurship; it merely transposes them onto unfamiliar terrain. A growing literature on "cultural entrepreneurship" treats museums and similar institutions as sites where entrepreneurial logics of resourcefulness, legitimacy-seeking, and strategic adaptation operate, but under constraints unknown to ordinary ventures. Näsholm and Eriksson's (2025) integrative review of cultural entrepreneurs found that they characteristically learn to thrive with limited resources, often by staying deliberately small and agile to preserve the artistic or mission-driven independence that originally justified the institution's existence - a strategy that looks like prudent management to an outsider but is, in fact, a defense of cultural integrity against market pressure. Lounsbury and Glynn's (2001) foundational account goes further, framing cultural entrepreneurship not just as resource acquisition but as the strategic construction of legitimacy and meaning: the entrepreneur (or the manager of a cultural organization) must persuade audiences, funders, and communities that the institution's story is worth investing in. This is the second faultline - museums and all cultural organizations must act entrepreneurially, courting their audience, sponsors, and innovation, while ensuring that entrepreneurial success is measured in cultural and social terms rather than commercial ones. This is observable, for instance, in the case of museums in a tension nowhere more visible than in debates over "museum

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touristification," where rising attendance and revenue can come at the cost of the very reverential, contemplative experience museums were built to offer.

The third faultline concerns the increasingly social profile of cultural organizations. For instance, what museums actually do with the objects in their care: artifacts and archival memory are inert until institutions convert them into living heritage, and the literature is emphatic that this conversion is social, not merely curatorial. The paradigm shift came with what is now called the "new museology," a movement emerging from the social and political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s that shifted museums' center of gravity from objects to people - drawing explicitly on Paulo Freire's pedagogy of dialogue and mutual learning rather than one-directional transmission of expert knowledge (Mayo, 2013). What theatres actually do with plays is analogous to what museums do with collections. Dramatic texts are inert until they are activated through performance, interpretation, and (interactive) encounters with various audiences. Similarly, over the past decades, orchestras have increasingly redefined themselves from custodians of classical music toward civic institutions that foster participation, inclusion, and community engagement, emphasizing music-making as a social practice rather than merely the faithful reproduction of masterpieces.

Stuart Hall's provocation "Whose heritage?" crystallized the political stakes of this shift: heritage is not a neutral inheritance waiting to be displayed but a contested narrative that museums help construct, and whoever controls that narrative determines whose past counts as worth remembering (Hall, 2023). Practically, this has translated into participatory and co-creative exhibition models, community outreach programs, and new forms of museums that extend "the museum" beyond any single building into the territory and lives of a community, and the "ecomuseum" (Davis, 2011) is frequently cited as an example. It reframes the museum as embedded in, rather than separate from, the community whose memory it holds, turning heritage-making into an ongoing collaborative practice rather than a one-time act of preservation. Ever-tight relations between museums and other cultural organizations and their communities are observable (Zbuchea, Iordan, & Michailov, 2024). Overall, sustainability in cultural management is an increasingly relevant point of reference.

What makes the museum such a revealing institutional case study is that these three faultlines are not independent — they constantly press against one another. A managed institution under budget pressure (faultline one) is tempted toward entrepreneurial strategies that increase footfall and revenue (faultline two), but doing so risks treating heritage as a marketable product rather than a co-created social meaning (faultline three), undermining the very mission that justified the museum's non-profit status in the first place. Conversely, an institution that prioritizes deep community co-creation may struggle to meet the efficiency and accountability metrics that funders and boards demand. The literature on museum values frameworks captures this directly, describing museums as organizations that must reconcile competing internal cultures (curatorial, managerial, and educational), each with legitimate but partially incompatible criteria for what counts as success.

Ultimately, the scholarship suggests that museums survive these tensions not by resolving them but by institutionalizing the balancing act itself: governance structures, mission statements, and professional norms (such as ICOM's own ethical code) function as ongoing mediators between the demands of management, the opportunities of entrepreneurship, and the social responsibility of heritage-making. Seen this way, the museum is less an exception to organizational theory than an unusually clarifying case of it: an institution where the usual proxies for success (profit, growth, efficiency) are deliberately suspended in favor of something harder to measure but, the field increasingly insists, no less real: the value a society places on its own memory.

The articles included in this issue try to grasp the diversity of the functions performed by museums and other cultural institutions, as well as to understand the

multidimensionality of activities and possible tensions. Ranging from intangible cultural heritage events to project management in cultural institutions and cooperation with young people, the papers in this issue present the various aspects of management in cultural institutions, navigating ongoing challenges while focusing on the memory and meaning of artifacts.

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Guest editor biographies

Silviu ANGHEL has been trained as a historian of the Greco-Roman World and holds a Ph.D. in Classics from Columbia University in the US. His research interests are diverse, ranging from cultural history in classical times to the cultural history of maps and mapping, resulting in a wide array of published studies. He was a fellow of the American Academy in Rome, the American School in Athens, and the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies in Istanbul. He worked at the EDRIS Center at the University of Göttingen, Germany, as well as at the National Museums of Old Maps and Books in Bucharest, Romania. Throughout his teaching and research, he has been interested in the role of religion in Late Antiquity, the history of cartography, and the history of warfare.

Magdalena SAWCZUK is an assistant professor at the Institute of Entrepreneurship of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Faculty of Management and Social Communication). Since October 2024, she has been a member of the Research Institute of Cultural Organizations Association (IBOK). Research interests primarily focus on value co-creation, innovative activities (including crowdsourcing and crowdfunding), and stakeholder experiences, with particular attention to the context of museum management.

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