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Increasing the Managerial Performance of Romanian Museums with the Help of Stakeholders

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Abstract
Museum professionals worldwide make considerable efforts to maintain the integrity of the cultural institutions they manage, as organizations that collect, research, conserve, and exhibit, as well as in their educational and social purpose, in a concerted effort to make museums more performing, more popular, more attractive and more competitive. In this context, many questions arise about how a performing museum looks like in the current social, political, and cultural contexts, how the performance of a museum can be evaluated, and, especially, how the managerial performance of museums can be increased. At the center of these concerns, the issue of stakeholders, the partnerships with them, the strategies for their optimal approach, as well as the impact of such initiatives on increasing the managerial performance of museums, occupy an essential role. One of the objectives of this research is to emphasize the need to use new strategies, methods, and tools in an attempt to make museum institutions perform better from a managerial point of view. To verify the perception of such initiatives, two practical applications were carried out: quantitative research, which analyzes the perception of internal stakeholders (museum staff) on the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving museum services, and qualitative research, which sought to capture the perception of museum managers in Romania regarding partnerships with stakeholders and their role in increasing the managerial performance of the institution. The results show that museums are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of stakeholders with an active interest in museum practices and policies and optimized solutions regarding the institutional and organizational transformation of museum institutions in Romania are taking shape, to rebuild the way museums interact with relevant stakeholders.

Keywords
Museum management; museum performance; museum stakeholders; stakeholder management.

Introduction

Each museum has a list of partners (friends, supporters, sponsors, donors). A list of partners as rich as possible is considered a standard, a model of good practice, but there are relatively few museums that also develop strategies to know their interests and to manage relations with them as effectively as possible. Museums are forced to turn their attention to partners and partnerships, because in the contemporary economic and political environments, the efficiency of relations, both with existing and potential partners, ensures access to a very diverse and almost unlimited range of resources, such as human, economic, know-how, scientific, specialized and many others.

In the 21st century, the traditional conception of the museum (as a mere depository of heritage) has changed, or better said, it has been enriched. Over at least the last 2 millennia there have been several paradigm shifts in the definition and role of museums. From a cabinet of curiosities, with an exclusive audience, to a depository of the cultural heritage of a community, an educational space, a complex cultural center (Zbuchea, 2010), a space for social and recreational interaction, to an engine of economic-social development of communities, with an almost universal addressability, both inside the

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community and outside it, in an attempt to respond as best as possible to the needs of the community and the current society.

Today the museum has become an active organization in society, managing diverse and multiple engagements for a varied range of members of a community (Filippoupoliti & Sylaiou, 2015), having a strong educational role as well as social interaction (Schettino, 2016), for a multicultural audience. The modern museum has become a provider of inclusive, comprehensive, and creative educational experiences that provides everyone with skills for living and participating equally in the society or community to which they belong (Filippoupoliti & Sylaiou, 2015).

To respond to these new requirements, it is necessary to improve the activities and services offered by a museum, by implementing several characteristics of a commercial organization such as the active presence of stakeholders, strategies, evaluations, and income diversification, as well as the permanent search for competitive advantages (Elsorady, 2018) in a diverse and rich competitive market. Also, effective stakeholder management is a proper way to develop.

The main objective of this research is to capture the perception of museum workers, from the 3 main branches (administrative, specialist, and management) regarding the benefits of involving external stakeholders in the decision-making process and their impact on improving the managerial performance of museums in Romania.

The work methodology involved 3 stages:

- Researching the specialized literature to generate an overview of stakeholder management in the museum space, stakeholders' impact, the benefits of their involvement in the decision-making process, and their contribution to increasing managerial performance;
- Analyzing the results generated by two studies, one quantitative and the other qualitative, carried out in the Romanian museum space;
- Formulation of conclusions regarding the topicality of the subject, the results of the two investigations, and their contribution to the understanding and implementation of partnerships with stakeholders in Romanian museums.

Literature review. Museum stakeholder management and organizational development

The impact of partnerships with stakeholders on museums

The term *stakeholder* was introduced into the economic language by Edward Freeman, in his work published in 1984 - *Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach,* and defines any individual or group of individuals who can affect, or be affected by, the actions of an organization or by achieving its objectives. Collaborating with community stakeholders, in a way that reflects the values and priorities of each, is seen by Clifford (2004) as the most effective way to engage with interest groups and the general public. The importance of knowing and consulting the members of a community, who will be affected by a program or project, is emphasized by Mitchell (1997), who also helps us to realize the advantages of such consultation: creating a sense of belonging to the proposed and adopted plan or solution and increased access to information.

Sinclair and Dale Hutchison (1998) give us another perspective for this concept: any group or individual who believes that its interests are affected by the results of a decision-making process, but bearing in mind that expressed interests can also include several personal values such as sense of social justice, spiritual values, and personal principles, apart from financial ones. The benefits brought to an organization by the involvement of stakeholders in the creation of strategies, decision-making, and the evaluation of projects are also confirmed by Monnikhof and Enelenbos (2001), who

summarize the strategy of stakeholder involvement in four stages: identifying the demand (desires, interests, criteria, and values stakeholders); their involvement in the process of finding solutions; negotiation – identification of interests; adopting the strategy with the largest number of "win-win" type solutions and making the decision (by consensus). Wolfe and Putler (2002) give us a picture of the final, ideal result of implementing effective stakeholder management: aligning and conforming organizations' priorities and actions with stakeholders' needs.

It is very important to mention that **the involvement of all interested parties (stakeholders) in the processes of creating strategies, decisions and evaluating the results is also a desire of the community members**, a trend that has registered a significant increase in recent years. This is materialized through direct participation on their part, and from the part of the institutions by recognizing their values and attitudes and offering more personalized services, according to the identified needs.

Regardless of the name they bear (authorities, sponsors, donors, friends, visitors, beneficiaries, clients, staff, etc.), all these entities are an integral part of the diverse category of stakeholders of a museum. **As an institution with a strong community role, the museum has to maintain a close relationship with its stakeholders, pursuing the fulfillment of both its objectives and their expectations and needs**.

The benefits of stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process of museums

In the specialized literature, there is general acceptance that traditional management methods, characterized by decision-making by a small team in charge or even by a single person, based on strictly financial and technical considerations, no longer correspond to contemporary reality (Ilie, 2019). A good example of deciding at the community level, in a consensual way, is found in the conceptual model developed by Sinclair and Dale Hutchison (1998) in Canada, called Multi-Stakeholder-Decision-Making (MSDM), through which an organization brings together as many stakeholders as possible, at an early stage of resource planning and decision-making, in an environment where both the institution and each stakeholder can look after their interests.

The co-opting of stakeholders in positions of key actors in the development of strategies ensures the success of the organization, a fact also supported by the results of the study carried out by Elsorady (2018) on museums in Egypt. The specialized literature carefully studies the increase in the degree of inclusion of visitors (perhaps the most important category of stakeholders), as well as the role of various groups in the community in making decisions about museum programs (O'Neil, 2006). The important role of participatory culture in museums, through which the museum becomes an active partner, sharing decision-making power with visitors, is also highlighted in the study conducted in Australia by Coghlan (2018).

Another example of the effective involvement of museum stakeholders in the decision-making process comes from Great Britain, where the Paul Hamlyn Foundation created the program *Our Museum - communities and museums as active partners* (White, 2016). The main innovation is **the alternative management team**, made up of community members, museum volunteers, and executive staff, who meet regularly and present their ideas and initiatives to the museum's official management team. An important category of stakeholders, who are waiting to be co-opted to support the management of the museum, from administrative to educational or curatorial activities, are volunteers, and the benefits of their involvement are widely presented by Zbuchea (2010b).

The positive aspects resulting from such initiatives, mainly facilitating the understanding of external environments and the ability to manage various situations, transforms institutional management into a more efficient decision-making system. Summarizing what has been presented so far, for stakeholder management to be truly effective, a real, open, and participatory dialogue is needed with all those who fall into this category. **The**

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more satisfied the stakeholders are, the faster and safer the museum develops, on all levels, and the easier it is to achieve its goals. As far as museums are concerned, effective management of the groups mentioned above will ensure the connection between satisfying their needs and improving the museum's activity, the ultimate goal being to choose and implement objectives and measures that serve the common good.

However, for the stakeholder theory to achieve its objectives, it is also necessary for the results to be quantifiable and periodically evaluated. In managing relationships with stakeholders, it is necessary for managers to periodically evaluate existing relationships with them and try to predict what will happen if the principles of stakeholder management theory will be applied effectively.

Increasing the managerial performance of museums with the help of stakeholders

Stakeholder theory generally deals with how partnerships with different categories of stakeholders should be managed and how they can be coopted into the decision-making process (Parmar et al., 2010). From Freeman (1984) until now, a large body of literature has been developed on stakeholders and the benefits of partnerships with them, in various fields and implicitly in that of the museum sector (Kotler & Kotler, 1998; Arinze, 1999; Halcro, 2008; Parmar et al., 2010; White, 2016; Ilie, 2018; Coghlan, 2018; Bitsos et al., 2019; Lehtinen et al., 2019; Milone & Pizzi, 2019; Moreno-Mendoza et al., 2019). The weak point of these studies is that the debate focuses on their numerical identification and specific characteristics, rather than on testing, the implementation of the stakeholder theory, the quantification of the results in the management performance of the institution, and the actual impact on the organization.

Traditionally, the value of a museum is given by the heritage assets it houses. But the value of goods is perceived differently, depending on the contextual factors in which the institution operates (historical, cultural, political, educational, and economic). From an economic point of view, the success of any institution and implicitly a museum is measured by profitability.

Although today museums are perceived as management institutions, however, Milone and Pizzi (2019) show that their impact on society cannot be quantified only economically, since a large part of its economic performance is related to intangible elements (impact in the community, reputation, location, as well as partnerships with other entities). However, the significant reduction in the contribution of public subsidies granted to museums in recent years has made urgent the need to invest the resources made available in a more efficient way, as well as to diversify the funding sources.

According to Moreno-Mendoza, Santana-Talavera, and León (2019), **an effective method to counter the effects of reduced revenues** (especially public subsidies) **is a rigorous analysis of the museum's relations with its stakeholders, but also the perception of staff from museum institutions regarding the involvement of external stakeholders in the institution's activity.**

Thus, we understand that there is **a need for increased attention to stakeholders**, especially external ones, and their commitment to the institution. If the activity of internal stakeholders is easily recognized in the planning and decision-making processes, in terms of the participation of external stakeholders, Lehtinen, Aaltonen, and Rajala (2019), as well as most researchers who have addressed this topic, argue in favor of the benefits brought by the involvement of external stakeholders and believe that it is crucial for the organization's performance and long-term survival.

Methodology

For testing the theoretical considerations and to see the degree of correlation between positive international initiatives with domestic reality, we need practical applications and tests. Next, we will present the results of **two** such **studies**:

A. Research No. 1

A quantitative study on the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving museum services and managerial performance for museums in Romania was part of a larger project (Ilie, 2019; 2020) based on museum research, stakeholder theory, investigations, and studies issued in the last decades in the field of museum organizations, in which a questionnaire was developed and addressed to the internal stakeholders of a museum (management, specialized and administrative staff). The main goal was to identify the respondents' perceptions regarding the relations that museums have with their stakeholders (internal and external). The study contains 24 items that try to reveal: the real situation of various partnerships with the stakeholders of a museum: authorities (governing and financing, community, sponsors, staff, associations, media, tourism, visitors); the ideal situation of some relations with stakeholders; and the segmentation criteria: the importance of the museum, type of financing, the position in the museum and accumulated service.

Four hypotheses were formulated to be tested by statistical methods:
Hypothesis 1: The position held in the museum influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity;
Hypothesis 2: Seniority in the position influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity;
Hypothesis 3: The importance of the museum (national, regional, or local) influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity;
Hypothesis 4: The type of financing of the museum influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity.

B. Research No. 2

A qualitative study regarding the role of museum partnerships with their stakeholders in increasing the managerial performance of museum institutions was carried out to identify the perception of Romanian museum managers regarding partnerships with stakeholders and obtain an X-ray of the real situation, their existence or their absence, types of involvement, effects (beneficial or negative). It represents an attempt to compare the information obtained from the study of the specialized literature with the practical experiences of museum managers.

The interview, the research tool most often considered for a general perspective on a phenomenon, was used for this research, in which 9 interviews were conducted, in the period 2019-2020, with managers in the Romanian museum sector. The interview was made up of 25 questions structured into three categories: internal stakeholders; external stakeholders - the visitor/public; external stakeholders - authorities, partner institutions, sponsors/donors, community, and private entities.

Experts were selected from among the management staff of 8 important museums (from 3 segments: national, county, and municipal/local), recognized at national and international levels for their rich activity and professionalism: The National Art Museum of Romania, Bucharest; Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu; The National Union Museum, Alba Iulia, Museikon section; Peleș National Museum, Sinaia; Bistrița Năsăud Museum Complex, Bistrița; Brăila Museum "Carol I", Brăila; Museum of Visual Arts, Galați; Oradea City Museum, Cultural Complex, Oradea. Quality and professional

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competence, moral probity, and managerial efficiency were important criteria for selecting the interviewees, taking into account the fact that "a museum manager links his professional destiny primarily to the performance of the institution: in the management of assets and patrimonial development; in the organization of specific activities that provide specific status and public recognition; in the quality of the offer and its rational administration" (Opriş, 2008, pp. 163-164).

Results and interpretation

A. Research No. 1

The results of the questionnaire were evaluated by statistical methods: testing the answers' coherence and consistency by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and the analysis of four hypotheses by the Alpfa Chi-square, Pearson's R, and Spearman correlation coefficients, with the help of SPSS software. The value of Cronbach's Alpha indicator, determined by processing the data with the SPSS software, is 0.883, which indicates a high level of internal consistency of the answers for the chosen scale, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Determination of the value of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha value	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items in the questionnaire
.883	.883	20

Source: author processing, based on the report provided by the SPSS software

The main findings of this study are centralized considering the following aspects: the profile of museums, financial aspects, and stakeholder management. Together, they offer a comprehensive view of the investigated phenomena.

<u>The segmentation criteria</u>

Table 2 presents a balanced structure of the respondent group.

Table 2. Structure of the sample

Criteria	Type	Percentage in sample
Distribution of respondents	Local museums Regional museums National museums	33% 36% 31%
Financing of the institution	Public Mixed Private	53% 31% 15%
Structure of respondents	Management staff Specialized staff Administrative staff	35% 51% 14%

Regarding the distribution of respondents, they are employed in local (33%), regional (36%), and national museums (31%), which gives a good weight, a favorable representation in the study, with an almost equal segmentation on interest groups. National museums are generally governed by the Ministry of Culture, regional ones by county councils, and local ones by town halls or private entities and individuals. Also, the data on the type of funding of museums reveals the fact that the public one is the majority (53%), and the private one (15%) is the smallest, being generally private collections of local importance.

Financial aspects

Table 3 presents the main results related to investigating the perception of the financial dimensions of museum activities.

Table 3. Main findings regarding financial mechanisms

Item	Percentage in sample
Coverage of funding: funds allocated to museums correspond only to current needs	69%
Investments: lack of the necessary funds	63%
Funding attraction: concern with concluding new partnerships with sponsors and donors	47%
Auto-financing: a greater share of own income is the key to the sustainable development of museums	79%

Although there is a high degree of autonomy and a good relationship with the governing and funding authorities, however, the funds allocated to museums only correspond to current needs, according to 69% of respondents. The degree of underfunding should stimulate the attraction, every year, of new sponsors, but the results show us that although 63% of museums are deficient in the area of investments, only 47% are concerned with concluding new partnerships with sponsors and donors. A significant percentage (47%) is recorded in terms of constructive links between the museum and its sponsors through partnerships and joint projects, but much more concrete actions are needed, especially at the legislative level to stimulate the interest of sponsors to get involved in the activities museums in Romania.

The majority of respondents agree that a greater share of their own income is the key to the sustainable development of museums, thus reducing the degree of dependence on funding authorities and improving services. However, increasing funding from own funds or sponsorships and donations cannot be seen as a panacea. Funds from private entities are influenced above all by the location of the museum and its visibility. Thus, small or rural museums face difficulties in generating income from the private sector, because it is a very time-consuming activity and is almost impractical for small museums that have few staff members.

In a conclusion, according to the data from the study, we can say that there is a strong dependency of museums on attracting funding not only for investments but also for diversifying the activity. A larger percentage of museums' own incomes is seen as a way to reduce the degree of dependence on funding authorities and improve services.

Stakeholder management and partnerships

The items that concern the relationship of museums with the stakeholders within the communities: social impact, added value, active partnerships, and development strategies, register positive responses, between 70% and 87%. Museum staff and employees from all work segments are important stakeholders within the organization, who usually if motivated, show dedication and develop a sense of belonging to the projects and programs in which they are involved. But the values may not reflect reality, as they are offered by the members of the organizations that should initiate and manage these partnerships and not their beneficiaries.

According to the collected data, 52% of the respondents are involved in the decision-making processes. However, if we reduce the percentage of management personnel (35%), who have concrete attributions within the decision-making process, we remain with a percentage of 17%. If we subtract those from the managerial sector from the total

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number of respondents, we are left with 65%, which means that only 11% of the specialized and administrative staff are involved in decision-making processes;

Regarding training activities, less than half benefit from such incentives (46%). Museum managers should be more aware of the ongoing training needs of employees and fight to identify sources of funding for training programs.

The benefits of involving people from outside the institution (external stakeholders) are recognized by only 47% of respondents, 35% are indifferent, and 20% disagree, which indicates the existence of a generalized feeling of reluctance towards external cooperation. Designing more open organizational cultures might help this process.

Nevertheless, 87% of respondents consider partnerships with other local, national, or international profile institutions to be beneficial and 61% of respondents currently experience partnerships with other associations, organizations, and groups, at a lower or higher level of complexity. The existence of a group of partners, from various fields of activity, is vital for the contemporary museum, as it provides access to invaluable resources.

An essential factor in adapting programs and services offered by museums is the analysis of visitor behavior, confirmed by 70% of respondents. We must recognize that the most important category of stakeholders, in terms of exhibition, educational and recreational activity, is represented by visitors. If we think about the cyclicality of such studies, the majority of respondents (88%) agree that they should be implemented annually. Regarding the real usefulness of these studies, given that, most of the time, they are thought up, implemented, and evaluated by the museums' staff, who do not have professional skills in this regard, some question marks remain. At the same time, the implementation of serious studies, ordered from specialized companies, involves very high costs, which can exceed the budget for programs, projects, and activities throughout the year.

Media stakeholders are an important category, which is involved in campaigns to popularize the activities of museums. The percentage of those who see benefits for the institution through such partnerships is a positive one - 63%. Worryingly, 37% have only partial or no such partnerships.

The recreation function is seen as a key element in contemporary museum management, a fact confirmed by 69% of respondents. Recreational activity is slowly but surely becoming one of the key objectives of the contemporary museum. In a society increasingly affected by daily stress, recreational activities end up creating a difference, which can be for the institution that feeling of the added value brought to the life of the community.

The tourism industry is a vital partner, but also a continuous challenge for adaptation and innovation, in an increasingly diverse competitive market. Foreign tourists have a culture of visiting museums, being probably the first institutions they are interested in when they arrive at a destination. However, according to the results of the questionnaire, only 51% of respondents state that museums are concerned and allocate funds to attract foreign visitors (from outside the community), 28% are indifferent and 21% do not have this concern, which adds up to a negative score of 49% in total.

Regarding the proposed hypotheses, after testing them with the Chi-square, Pearson's R, and Spearman statistical indicators, three of the four working hypotheses were invalidated (see Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of testing the four hypotheses

No.	HYPOTHESIS	Hypothesis testing result
1.	The position held in the museum influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity.	**Invalidated**
2.	Seniority in the position influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity.	**Validated**
3.	The importance of the museum (national, regional, or local) influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity.	**Invalidated**
4.	The type of financing of the museum influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity.	**Invalidated**

Only the second hypothesis was validated: **the length of time in the occupied position influences the perception of the benefits of the involvement of external stakeholders in the process of improving the museum's activity**. This validation proves to us that museums have a strong educational role, even for internal stakeholders - the staff of the institution. Education through formal and non-formal programs, but also the experience gained along with seniority in the job, pave the way for a positive perception of the involvement of professionals from outside the museums in the process of improving the activity in the museums they come from.

Overall, the results of the quantitative study highlight an agreement in principle between the respondents regarding the potential role of stakeholders in obtaining competitive advantages for the museum, and also in creating added value for the community. Stakeholders are also recognized, especially for the help provided to obtain information, experience, and income diversification, and community stakeholders (NGOs, various community centers, commercial organizations, etc.) can have an important role in the equation, through the exchange of experience regarding the partnerships made with stakeholders and through the contribution of innovative ideas to improve managerial performance.

B. Research No. 2

We draw several general outputs from the qualitative analysis. First of all, we appreciate the diversity of the information provided by the respondents and we are aware that their answers depend a lot on the reality they face and the type of museum they manage (national, regional, or local). Starting from the question formulated by the great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, after he visited the USA in 1930, "Museums. What are they and what should they be?" (Iorga, 1934) (a topic brought into the discussion after the impact that American museography had on the scholar), we also understand step by step what is the reality of museum partnerships with stakeholders and what are the benefits or, possibly, negative effects.

Although the answers provided by a single respondent are not always satisfactory in the sense of correlating the trends of Romanian museography with the reality of countries with a rich tradition in this sector, the rich and diverse information and experiences of all respondents can constitute a manual of good practices in museography and provide us hope for the future of museums in Romania. For exemplification, in the following, we will reproduce the synthesis of the answers provided by the respondents regarding the involvement in the decision-making process of the three categories of stakeholders proposed in the interview, as well as the perception of the benefits offered by this type of partnership.

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To ensure the confidentiality of the responses, the managers were coded with letters from A to I, randomly.
The questions and answers chosen for exemplification were grouped into 3 big themes :

- cooperation with the internal stakeholders;
- relationships with museum's visitors;
- mapping stakeholder partnerships.

Cooperation with the internal stakeholders

Involvement of the museum staff in the decision-making process

Most of the answers (6/9) indicate that only specialized staff, heads of departments, and services are involved in the decision-making process. C slightly increases the scope of involvement by including the supervisory staff in the list. D mentions that, however, the opinions and proposals of the executive staff are collected and brought to the attention of the department heads, even if they are not directly involved. F divides the degree of involvement of the staff employed in the institution into two categories: almost 100% in terms of "the initiative of the activities and the method of addressability to the public" and a restricted one, only of specialist staff, when decisions are made and work on "obtaining the optimal quality of the cultural product to be offered to the public". I speaks of the involvement of specialized staff when it comes to the operation and development of the institution, as well as the development of cultural activities, and a wider co-optation in the decision-making team of all the factors involved, from all levels, when they are put in debate "system and operational procedures".

Effects on the organization regarding the involvement of museum staff in decision-making processes

"Efficient use of human resources" is mentioned by E, F, and G, "motivating staff to perform their tasks as professionally as possible" is the opinion of H, D sees as positive effects "diversifying activities and forming an overview of the institution". C says he sees an improvement, due to the involvement of staff in the decision-making process, in the sense that "the institution is perceived as a family where decisions are made for the common good". For B, the positive effect on the organization is the "encouragement of creativity", and A reports the implementation of a "democratic decision-making system". I divides the positive effects on the organization into two sections: in the general plan - "harmonizing the institution's objectives with the available resources", and in the applied plan on interpersonal relations - "the efficiency of communication and the implementation of effective collaboration strategies that are reflected in the activity of the organization and the offer addressed to the culture-consuming public".

We might conclude that the approach of internal stakeholders is generally considered through a functional lens, rather than a strategic one. Nevertheless, the involvement of staff seems to be the norm according to museum managers, and this process is positively evaluated by them.

Relationships with museum's visitors

Involvement of visitors in the decision-making process

D does not think that visitors "can be actively involved in the decision-making plan", I - "not directly", but "the opinion expressed by them is still taken into account in the situation of adapting a decision of special interest to bring of decisions closer to the beneficiary". A agrees with I, claiming that visitors can still "influence, through proposals, the organization of cultural events or can signal some problems of an organizational nature, or even related to the behavior of the staff", D adding the fact that

"their suggestions are analyzed for the remediation of any communication deficiencies". All these visitor engagement methods (suggestions, proposals, opinions) reported so far are facilitated by "filling in opinion questionnaires" (E). F, although he supports the involvement of visitors in the decision-making process, shows that the methods used so far, with "information collected mainly by filling in questionnaires, have proven to be ineffective, too few of the visitors have time for such a thing". But it also offers us a possible solution - "discussions within the guides, and upon departure, the visitors are asked if they enjoyed the visit and if they were to return, what they would like to see in addition".

Effects on the organization regarding the involvement of visitors

The respondents mentioned: "real-time knowledge of the visiting public" (E), of its expectations (H), "knowledge of the visitors' opinion regarding a certain exhibition" (G), "realization, based on demand, of an adapted and diversified cultural agenda " (D), "the presence of a larger number of participants in the activities" than the target (F), "knowledge of the effect of the museum approach in the community" (C), image development, "positive effect on some management indicators of quality" (B), new "collaborative relations and economy of human resources" (A). Active participation in raising awareness of the value of local, regional, and national heritage, as well as the need to know and protect it, is also encouraged. At the same time, suggestions may appear that influence the decisions of the authorities regarding the heritage owned by the museum" (I).

Regarding the managers' evaluation of the relationships with museum visitors, we notice that there is a reluctance regarding their involvement in the decision-making process, and possible practical applications of this desire are seen only indirectly, by assimilating some opinions, collected through discussions, notebooks of impressions and suggestions, questionnaires or online ratings.

Mapping stakeholder partnerships

The main active partnerships

According to the answers given by the interviewees, the main partnerships of museums in Romania are with: central and local authorities (E), the educational environment (I) – kindergartens, schools (F), high schools, universities (A), research institutes (B); institutions with a similar object of activity – other museums (H), cultural centers (A), cultural institutions from the country and abroad (I), cultural associations (A, G); ethnic communities (B); NGO sources and associations like friends of the museum (E, I); private collectors (G, H).

Benefits

From the discussion with A, we understand that every museum has a cultural strategy, "which is adapted according to the resources, the characteristics of the targeted public categories, their preferences, cultural consumption trends, stakeholders in general". B completes by pointing out that "any ongoing partnership may influence certain decisions related to this collaboration" and more. C and I declare that they have not made such efforts, while F says that there have been several "attempts to diversify in the community, but it does not have other categories of potential partners besides the educational ones, or at least not yet they showed interest in culture". C, E, G, and H support the involvement of relevant partners in the educational process and also show us some examples and effects: the involvement of culturally relevant partners in the scientific council, where following consultations on the museum development plan relevant advice emerges and new exposure and promotion approaches (G); consulting representatives of other museum institutions – improving exhibition and educational

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projects (H), or even building a new headquarters, as a result of the involvement of all relevant partners (C).

In what concerns the active partnerships of the museums with their stakeholders, we can conclude that, in general, there is a wide range of partners and partnerships, but at the unitary level, depending on the specifics of the museum, the infrastructure it has, the addressability, community, national or even international, as well as the cultural diversity and promoted ethnicity, the reality is different. Most of the profile institutions are experiencing partnerships with a limited community of private or public entities. More relevant in structure and more meaningful in terms of frequency are the educational partnerships. From the data collected we can conclude that the involvement of the relevant partners in the decision-making process, at the present moment, is mainly carried out in the scientific council, where following the consultations on the museum layout plan, relevant advice and new approaches to exhibiting objects or promoting specific cultural activities appear.

Discussions and conclusion

The role of museums is evolving rapidly in contemporary society. In the context of the changing needs of visitors (social, educational, and recreational) and taking into account technological advancements, Arinze (1999) shows that museums must constantly reevaluate their programs and improve their offers to be effective, relevant, and to meet the real requirements of the community they belong to. In this sense, more and more efforts are being made to reflect in the institution's objectives and mission the values of the community of which it is a part. According to Bitsos et al. (2019), these changes force museum specialist staff to have a multidisciplinary approach and constantly engage in consultation with the community. Thus, the ability of museums to adapt their mission to the changing needs of the communities they serve is, as Hooper-Greenhill (2006) argues, the key to ensuring their long-term performance and existence as credible cultural institutions and prospects, demonstrating the value brought to the community, in exchange for the trust granted through grants and other types of income.

Even though there is an apparent lack of strategic thinking regarding stakeholder competitive advantage, from the literature, from the valuable demonstrations of Kotler and Kotler (1998), as well as from the examples presented in this paper, we understand that museums are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of stakeholder with an active interest in museum practices and policies. What is probably still missing is more courage and determination to experiment with new partnerships and the benefits they bring.

The results of the analysis of the specialized literature, the two practical studies, quantitative and qualitative, and as well as some other studies that reflected the reality of Romanian museums, such as Bira and Zbuchea (2019) and Zbuchea and Bira (2020), helped us understand that museum stakeholders can quickly anticipate market expectations, thus contributing to a better adaptation of the offer to the changing needs of visitors, by activating a participative and open dialogue mechanism that stimulates the optimization of both the services offered to visitors and the institutional management in general. Step by step, optimized solutions regarding the institutional and organizational transformation of museum institutions in Romania are taking shape, to rebuild the way museums interact with relevant stakeholders.

The work also has limitations, which we honestly assume. The quantitative analysis carried out has several limitations, among which the most obvious is the small sample (100 people), the results obtained cannot be generalized for the entire Romanian or global museology. More conclusive results that could be generalized can be obtained if the sample will be increased and the research will address several categories of stakeholders (internal and external). Regarding the qualitative analysis, more

respondents should be selected in the future, and the interviews should be conducted face-to-face to capture the emotions of the study participants. We also consider it opportune to carry out several qualitative analyzes that capture the perspective of external stakeholders - partners outside the institution.

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