

# Social Barometer of Museums

## Results of the test phase

Museums

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## Social Barometer of Museums. Presentation of the results of the test phase

The Social Barometer of Museums (BSM) is a project undertaken by the Museums and Moveable Assets Protection Service. Within the framework of the *Catalan Museums Plan*, the BSM has been conceived as one of the actions of objective 6.3, with the intention of becoming a basic tool for increasing awareness of museums' public value.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, the project echoes the idea of social museum that articulates the *Museums Plan*, as it seeks to show the benefits contributed by the museums to society as a whole, highlighting the positive impact they have on people's individual and collective lives and showing the collaborative work they perform to meet current societal challenges.

The BSM is an advocacy instrument whose intention is to give visibility to the tasks performed by museums beyond their canonical functions, publically showcasing the efforts made to become more accessible to their audiences. At the same time, it facilitates the creation of a support network to facilitate reflection on the social issues that are of most concern to museum professionals.

To achieve these objectives, the BSM needs to gather data that measure museum's capacity to facilitate social impacts, that is, it must become a tool that generates evidence and numerical data that can provide a basis for communicating their work and, at the same time, contribute to improving museum management. Accordingly, it is defined as a "list of indicators on museums' social performance to show the benefits they bring to society, shedding light on less visible activities (preservation and management of collections, research) through the impacts they have, but also on the activities with which the public interacts most directly (education, exhibitions, visits...)".<sup>2</sup>

The BSM is the outcome of a process that began in 2018, with the draft model developed by the consultant Margarida Loran.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, this document provides a review of the literature currently existing on the concept of public value and other previous assessment frameworks, and, on the other hand, it provides a broad range of indicators as a starting point, divided into six impact areas:

- 1. Broaden participation:** it analyses the correlation between the museums' audience and the demographic diversity of Catalonia's population, highlighting the effort made to improve access to their content and diversify the audience.
- 2. Preserve heritage:** it enquires into the contribution made to the construction of a collective memory, identity and sense of belonging and the heritage's accessibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific objective 6.3. "Increase museums' visibility by means of strategies intended to promote their public value" in *Museus 2030. Pla de museus de Catalunya*. Catalan Ministry of Culture, 2020, pp. 174-175. Available at: <<https://cultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/sscc/pla-museus-2030/documents/Pla-Museus-aprovat-Govern-2020.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. *Museus 2030. Pla de museus de Catalunya*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Loran, Margarida. *Baròmetre Social dels Museus. Proposta de model i desenvolupament*, 2018. Available at: <[https://cultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/dgpc/museus/02-dimensio\\_social/barometre\\_social/Proposta-de-Barometre-Social-dels-Museus\\_2.pdf](https://cultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/dgpc/museus/02-dimensio_social/barometre_social/Proposta-de-Barometre-Social-dels-Museus_2.pdf)>.

3. **Strengthen social capital:** it discusses the actions that strengthen citizen interactions, social cohesion, the inclusion of minority groups and communities' quality of life or wellbeing.
4. **Increase public knowledge:** it addresses the capacity to generate new knowledge and how this knowledge contributes to working on societal challenges and building a more inclusive society.
5. **Serve education:** it links museums' educational action with schools and improving education in Catalonia.
6. **Advance societal change:** it assesses museums' effects with respect to the SDGs and their connection with sustainability, social justice and cultural diversity.

In accordance with this first phase, during 2019, a pilot group of professionals discussed and agreed on the selection of the 35 indicators considered most important, taking into account their level of meaningfulness and the feasibility of obtaining them. The group also decided that they had to be gathered applying both quantitative and qualitative techniques.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in 2022, the Public Observatory of Cultural Heritage of Catalonia (OPPCC) was given the task of implementing a test phase, with the goal of verifying and scaling application of the tool, as had been planned. This phase has focused on the quantitative analysis, whose results are presented in this report, while the qualitative analysis will be defined after reviewing the good practices detected in the initial information gathering process and studying similar international models.

The quantitative analysis has used a self-assessment methodology in which 12 museums in different parts of Catalonia, with very different sizes and areas of specialisation, have voluntarily contributed information about the 35 indicators.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the OPPCC has supplemented the information provided by the museums with the Annual Visitors Count and other data that had been recorded previously in the Catalan Museums Register.

Counting and analysing museums' social impact, first numerically, and, in the future, systematically, is a complex exercise. In this, it is pioneering the field in Spain and is the first that makes it possible to assess a series of actions that are essential for defining what a museum is and which are normally not included in the statistics. Furthermore, the BSM may become a useful instrument for requesting support from other organisations involved in the management of institutions, insofar as it furnishes quantitative and qualitative evidence.

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<sup>4</sup> The pilot group's members were the consultant Margarida Loran, a professional from the Museums and Moveable Assets Protection Service and one representative each from the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, the Maritime Museum of Barcelona, the National Art Museum of Catalonia, the Museum of the Ter, the Museum of Rural Life and the Museums of Sant Cugat. More information at: <https://cultura.gencat.cat/ca/temes/museus/dimensio-social/barometre-social/grup-de-treball-del-barometre-social/>.

<sup>5</sup> The museums that have taken part in the test phase are: Can Quitana. Museum of the Mediterranean, Girona Art Museum, Museum of Guissona, Museum of Rural Life, Museum of the Ter, Museum of the Val d'Aran, Ethnological Museum of Montseny, Frederic Marès Museum, Maritime Museum of Barcelona, National Art Museum of Catalonia, National Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia, and Museums of Esplugues de Llobregat.

The results obtained in the test phase – described below – are positive and offer many examples of good museum practices. The individual and collective projects studied are evidence of the museums' cooperation and constant work with local entities, associations and agents, while also fostering reflection and debate on social issues with input from different social groups.

However, use of the questionnaire has shown that it is necessary to refine and redefine certain impact areas and their indicators in order to align the BSM's questionnaire with the other data collection models currently used and to cater for the heterogeneity of the Catalan museum system. Consequently, thanks to this phase and the qualitative part that will be implemented in coming months, work is currently in progress on fine-tuning the BSM to make it more inclusive and provide a holistic view of the Catalan museums' social contributions.

The idea is to extend implementation of the BSM to all the other museums in Catalonia that wish to take part on a voluntary basis and, by this means, obtain a broader picture of their public value. As the information collected shows, Catalan museums already include this collective vision and are orienting their activities towards this social museum model.

Below is an executive summary with the most salient data obtained in the test phase. In addition, the results report issued by the OPPCC is included, with the questions corresponding to all six impact areas and the charts plotted on the basis of the results. In addition, each section includes examples of good practices and comments on the importance and meaning of each of the indicators.

## Executive summary

The data provided by the twelve museums taking part in the test phase show that they are working along the lines of the social museum pursued by the *Museums Plan*.

### Broaden participation

Museums are institutions that work in the service of society in a broad sense and in all its diversity. In numerical terms, although the visitor figures do not relate directly with social impact, they do show a return to in-person visits, which in turn is an indication of the value attributed to museums by the public. In total, the museums taking part in the test phase received 655,354 visitors, of which **64.7%** were able to enter the museum free of charge.

### Preserve heritage

Apart from the number of heritage items and objects that have been preserved (1,571,523 in total), the surveyed museums manage **301 spaces and monuments** in addition to their main facilities. This co-management is particularly prevalent in the smaller museums. Given their expertise, they are often involved in protecting and promoting municipal buildings in partnership with locally-based organisations.

Thus, museums have a strong presence in their territory and context, either because they perform the function of museum rooted in their territory's identity, as is the case of the Museums of the Val d'Aran, or because they contribute to the construction or restoration of local memory, identity and sense of belonging.

Indeed, museums become curators of shared memories when they take part in **memory restoration projects** in their community. Of the 59 initiatives that the test phase museums have taken part in, the exhibition [Memories of a pandemic](#) stands out, as it is the result of a collective appeal to the public to bring material related to their experience of Covid-19 with the goal of reflecting on the pandemic's effects and disseminate in real time a historic period of truly global significance.

With the intention of fostering access to heritage and making it accessible and interesting to the public, the 12 museums have taken part in **33 projects in cooperation** with other social agents, involving a wide range of subject fields (art, history, anthropology, sexism, etc.) and typologies (documentation, preservation, education, social inclusion, etc.).

### **Strengthen social capital**

Museums have boosted their interactions with the public. Thus, the museums included in the test phase have established a total of **113 partnerships** with cultural, civic or educational organisations in their catchment area. In this respect, 68 of these partnerships are not linked directly to the cultural sphere, which shows the effort made by museums to integrate their communities' concerns and needs in their programmes of activities, beyond the heritage aspects.

Furthermore, the members of these museums' teams have joined **88 local participation bodies** that are active in different professional fields (heritage, culture, education, society, environment, urban planning, etc.) to work on projects within a cooperative framework with the other agents in their territory. In addition, they have been assisted by 118 volunteers who have engaged actively with the museum's day-to-day running.

On the other hand, the data gathered show that museums have a meaningful role to play in fostering social cohesion, insofar as they become meeting places for the community and are open to different uses and activities. Thus, the surveyed museums have hosted activities organised by other organisations, in which a total of 101,653 users have taken part.

With the goal of contributing to their local community's quality of life, the museums have also offered 85 programmes targeting specific audiences, such as families or young people. In addition, 36 activities have been developed for people with functional diversity or other disabilities and 62 for people and groups at risk of social exclusion, with a total of **3,582 users**.

The interest in achieving universal accessibility and improving people's wellbeing are aspects shared by all Catalan museums. Most museums are part of or promote programmes that require using their facilities as inclusive environments for reflection, facilitating people's social integration or wellbeing and enjoyment. For example, the Maritime Museum of Barcelona's project [Sea & Memory](#) and the project [Memories and memory at the Museums](#) undertaken by the Museums of Esplugues de Llobregat, seek to evoke the experience of people with dementia to help improve their social relations, self-esteem and emotional state.

## Increase public knowledge

Museums democratise knowledge and make it available to the general public, either by digitising their collections (between them, the 12 participating institutions have **188,708 items** freely available in open access) or by offering pieces on loan to other organisations or museums.

Furthermore, museums generate new knowledge through the scientific research performed in their subject fields, contribute their expertise in external programmes and collaborate with universities and research centres. Specifically, the test phase museums have published 46 scientific papers, they have taken part in 110 external projects and 8 research activities funded with competitive grants, and they have established 44 collaborative partnerships with universities and higher education centres.

In order to encourage citizen participation and, at the same time, share knowledge, the museums promote **documentation projects** (101 counted in the questionnaire) that actively engage with the local population, who give their testimony on memory linked to their territory and contribute to their collections.

The museums collaborate and work together to address shared societal and sector-specific challenges. In total, the 12 museums are members of **49 different networks** (34 in Catalonia and 15 outside of Catalonia), highlighting in particular the territorial and subject-related networks run by the Museums and Moveable Assets Protection Service or the Barcelona Provincial Council's Network of Local Museums.

## Serve education

Museums are institutions with a high educational value that can contribute to improving both formal and non-formal education in Catalonia and which work to guarantee equal access to educational content. For this reason, most museums work with their local schools or education centres.

In general terms, the participating museums' school penetration rate has been **8.3%**, receiving a total of 92,486 school visitors (74.1% with free admission), 453 medium or maximum complexity groups, and 16,050 post-secondary education students.

Specifically, these museums have concluded **31 covenants with local education centres** and have developed **19 projects with non-formal education centres**. For example, the Museum of Rural Life and the Museum of the Ter, in partnership with local secondary schools, have hosted syllabus diversification projects designed as a measure to cater for student diversity, targeting teenagers in compulsory secondary education with learning difficulties. As another example, the Museum of Guissona is developing tailored educational programmes for the towns' schools and the Ethnological Museum of Montseny is offering local schools its [\*Montseny at school\*](#) programme, which seeks to awake an awareness in schoolchildren of the need to protect the environment.

As an educational resource that fosters innovation in teaching initiatives, the museums are working with the educational community to enhance students' learning quality, for example, by organising workshops, teachers' sessions or allowing schools to use their facilities. In addition, most museums provide schools with teaching dossiers that complement the educational activities they offer.

## Advance societal change

All museums work to advance societal change by encouraging reflection and debate on the challenges currently facing society. Accordingly, all of them are **committed to the United Nations' SDGs**, engaging in initiatives in related subject areas such as temporary exhibitions, activities, guided tours or re-readings of their collections. Two fundamental issues that all museums have addressed are gender equality and combatting climate change, with programmes such as [\*En clau de dones\*](#) (Through women's eyes) at the Girona Art Museum or [\*Calidoscopi. Alteració i \(r\)Responsabilitat\*](#), (Kaleidoscope. Alteration and (r)Responsibility) at the Museum of the Mediterranean.

At the same time, the museums apply **sustainable management models** and disseminate measures aligned with the SDGs: reusing materials, reducing emissions from energy use, saving water or buying from local suppliers, among others. In addition, a number of museums hold official environmental certifications, including the Museum of Rural Life, the Frederic Marès Museum, the National Art Museum of Catalonia and the National Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia.