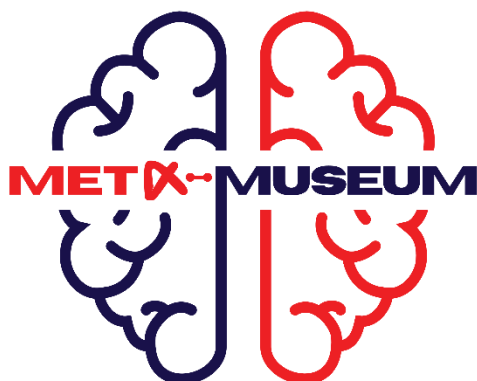




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META-MUSEUM

*Moving **E**motions towards confidence in the **T**ransformative
Appropriation for a **M**eaningful **U**nderstanding of cultural
heritage: a neuro**S**cientific approach to **E**uropean **M**useums*

DELIVERABLE D2.2

TITLE Report on Audience Analysis and Understanding of
Transformative Nature of Cultural Heritage (CH)

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DISSEMINATION LEVEL PU - Public SEN - Sensitive

TYPE R - document, report DMP - Data
Management Plan
 DATA - Data sets,
microdata, etc DEM - Demonstrator,
prototype
 OTHER

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DELIVERABLE REVIEW HISTORY

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Final	31 March 2025	Submission to EC portal

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
CH	Cultural Heritage
EMA	European Museum Academy
ES	Exploratory Study
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
M	Mean (Average)
SD	Standard Deviation
TMt	TransforMeans theory

FRAMEWORK

1. Reference to WP and tasks as described in the DoA

WP2: Theoretical framework and T2.1 Transformative nature of CH: stakeholders and audience analysis.

2. WP2 and T2.1 objectives as described in the Proposal

WP2 aims at providing a robust theoretical framework in designing, implementing and assessing the META-MUSEUM activities. Through a transdisciplinary perspective, it will deepen the perception of the transformative nature of CH and the empathic approach to make it understandable to citizens and increase their confidence.

D2.2 is related to T2.1: A preliminary study will define and analyze confidence, resilience and perception of the transformative nature of CH in different audiences, as there is a lack of structured data on these components in European citizens.

A short survey will be carried out among involved stakeholders on the potential societal benefits of the transformative nature of CH, as there is a lack of data and a lack of awareness on this.

Identify all typologies of users: social conditions and reference context. Describe the disaffected public and non-public, who have been very often underestimated in cultural strategies: social conditions and reference context.

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1 Introduction

The META-MUSEUM project aims to explore **cultural experiences through a neuropsychophysiological and cognitive lens**, focusing on emotional dynamics and the effectiveness of narrative solutions in fostering visitors' emotions, deeper understanding, and confidence. This project emphasises the transformative potential of cultural heritage (CH) and seeks to engage audiences in meaningful, empathic ways, ultimately enhancing public confidence in and connection to CH.

This document presents **the objectives, methods of data collection and analysis, findings, main conclusions, and key recommendations of the Stakeholder and Audience Preliminary and Exploratory Study (ES)**, conducted within the framework of Task 2.1 (T2.1). This study plays a fundamental role in the theoretical work of Work Package 2 (WP2), which adopts a transdisciplinary perspective to guide all related activities. WP2 establishes a solid theoretical foundation for the design, implementation, and evaluation of META-MUSEUM activities, emphasizing the transformative nature of Cultural Heritage (CH) and its potential to nurture empathy and confidence among citizens.

Task 2.1 involves conducting a preliminary investigation to define and analyse the concepts of confidence, resilience, and perceptions regarding CH's transformative impact across diverse audiences. This task addresses the existing gap in structured data concerning these components within the European population. As part of the ES, data were collected from stakeholders and the general public to evaluate the societal benefits linked to CH's transformative power and to raise awareness of its broader societal influence.

Moreover, T2.1 aims to categorize different user typologies, considering their social contexts and reference backgrounds. Particular focus was given to understanding and describing disaffected public and non-public audiences, groups frequently neglected in cultural strategies, to ensure a more inclusive and representative approach. **With insights from social and psychological sciences, the study aims to deepen the understanding of CH's transformative nature from the perspective of various audience groups.**

This research also explores the definitions, components, and indicators of confidence and resilience. **Within WP2 activities, this analysis will contribute to the development of an Assessment and Interpretation Model based on the initial assumptions of META-MUSEUM and the theoretical framework.** This model will undergo continuous refinement through the interpretation of experimental findings, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of CH's impact on different societal groups.

2 Conceptual Framework for Stakeholder and Audience Analysis

In this section we introduce the conceptual framework for the Stakeholder and Audience Analysis, beginning with the theoretical framework, motivating the core constructs addressed in the research and outlining the methodological approach.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

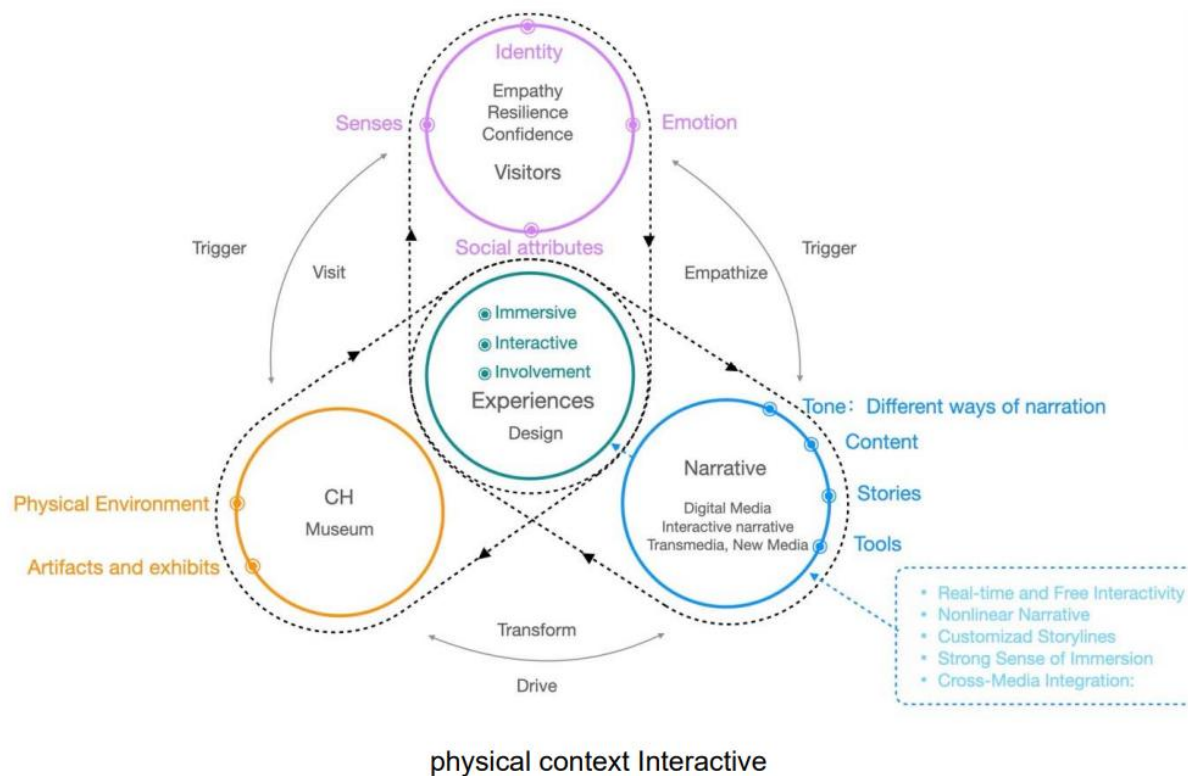
The META-MUSEUM project investigates the neuropsychosocial impacts of engagement with cultural heritage, specifically examining whether empathy, confidence and resilience can be enhanced through encounters with cultural heritage. A central aim is to identify the cultural communication strategies that can facilitate these benefits across diverse audience groups. **The theoretical foundation for this research is the TransforMeans Theory (TMt), which postulates a model of the mechanisms through which cultural heritage encounters can result in psychosocial benefits and provides an initial framework for their empirical research** which will continue to be developed and refined over the course of the project (Minucciani et al., 2024).

The TMt proposes that cultural heritage has the potential to foster personal and social growth by promoting social integration, inclusion and well-being. **The transformative nature of cultural heritage emerges when visitors engage with cultural heritage on an emotional level, interpreting the exhibits through a personal lens comprising their background, personality, memories and inclinations** (Benente & Minucciani, 2022). Such emotionally charged experiences tend to be more memorable and impactful (Varutti, 2023; Whitcomb, 2015), fostering self-reflection and curiosity, which in turn may enhance self-awareness, a sense of belonging, and the development of empathy through identification with the experiences of others and recognition of the diversity of human existence.

The transformative nature of cultural heritage is also reflected in visitors' perceptions of cultural resilience, as they come to understand that cultural artefacts and knowledge exist in a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation (Minucciani et al., 2024). Thus, presented with heritage that weathers change through its ability to adapt, the viewer may internalise the inevitability of change and the notion of resilience as adaptability, perhaps growing in confidence in the face of contemporary challenges and viewing adversity as an opportunity for growth and learning. Viewing cultural heritage as a dialogue between traces of the past and contemporary interpretations, TMt explores cultural heritage as a model of dynamic resilience, mirroring evolving and interconnected societies.

The practical application of TMt raises the question of how transformative experiences can be facilitated for diverse audiences. TMt provides a framework for designing transformative cultural heritage experiences, detailing the interdependent relationships between the visitor and the key design components: the cultural artefacts, the physical environment and the narrative experience (Minucciani et al., 2024) (Figure 1). **The visitor is positioned as an active participant within this cyclical feedback system in which individual perceptions and emotional state interact with the other components. The cultural artefacts and environments serve as focal stimuli eliciting affective and cognitive processes in the viewer.** These are presented to the viewer within the frame of the physical environment (the communicative atmosphere) (Varutti, 2023), the experiential design (e.g. immersive or interactive experiences) and the narrative experience (e.g. storytelling methods, digital and other media). These components all contribute to the process of interpretation (Benente & Minucciani, 2022), with spatial context setting an emotional tone and narrative techniques such as cultural storytelling activating emotional connection and empathic responses (Bonacini & Marangon, 2020).

Figure 1. Key components in designing transformative cultural heritage experiences



Note: Interdependent relationships are shown between the visitor and the key design components: the cultural artefacts, the experiential design and the narrative experience. From Deliverable D2.1 TransforMEANS Theory. First Version (p. 25), by V. Minucciani, M. Benente, H. Zipsane, & Y. Sun, 2024. Copyright (2024) by META-MUSEUM. Reprinted with permission.

2.2 Conceptual Framework Core Constructs for Stakeholder and Audience Analysis

With the ultimate objective of creating meaningful encounters with cultural heritage, the TMT motivates further exploration of a) factors shaping public interest and engagement with CH, and b) factors influencing the quality of encounters with CH.

Public interest and engagement with cultural heritage is mediated by people’s pre-existing beliefs and expectations about cultural institutions (Bitgood, 2016), so research into public perceptions is necessary when designing strategies to appeal to wider audiences and local communities (Gradén & O’dell, 2016). Public perceptions can be broken down into people’s expectations of what the museum experience may provide and how this matches up with their desires for spending their free time (Hood, 1983), visitors’ motivations (Falk, 2016), and preconceptions about cultural institutions and which communities they serve (Golding & Modest, 2013). The positionality of cultural institutions (such as whether they are perceived as authoritative, exclusive, community-centred or participatory) shapes the public’s relationship with them and their levels of engagement. Individual encounters with cultural heritage are also affected by perceptions. As Falk and Dierking (2013) note, the museum visitor is not an ‘empty vessel’: **visitors do not passively absorb cultural narratives but instead actively construct meaning based on their existing frameworks of knowledge, including expectations and beliefs about who and what**

museums are for. The multiple facets of public perception of CH are therefore a core construct to be researched, in order to understand how this influences engagement and encounters with cultural heritage.

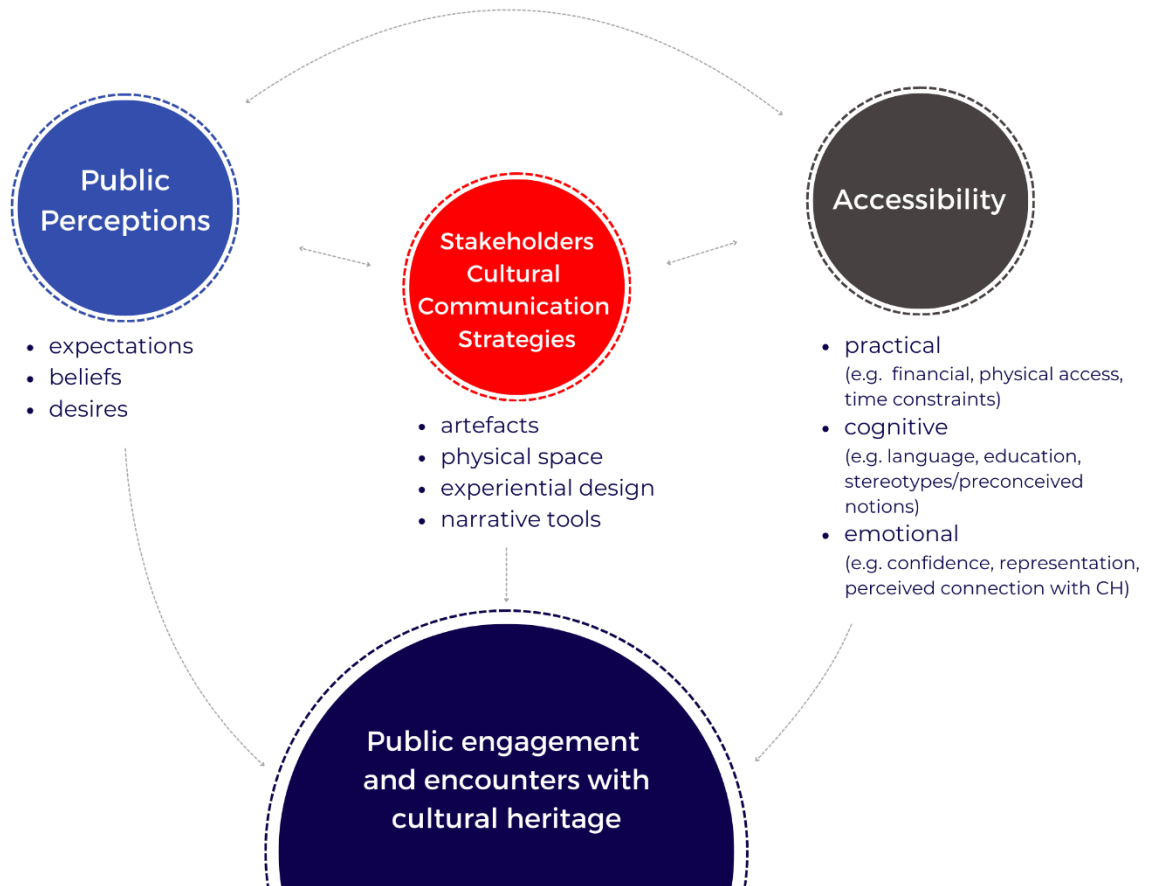
Public engagement with CH also depends on the accessibility of meaningful encounters. There are multiple barriers to consider, on a practical level (e.g. financial cost, physical access, time constraints), and on the cognitive and emotional levels (Benente & Minucciani, 2020). These barriers are heterogeneous and overlapping, so exploration of multiple dimensions is needed including language, narrative style and tone, assumed prior knowledge, the physical space, and the degree of representation, both in exhibition programming and in the diversity of professionals working in cultural spheres. Strategies for promoting cultural accessibility that emerge from this such as facilitating active participation and co-creation (Cesário & Campos, 2024) and the integration of diverse perspectives through intercultural dialogue (Bodo et al., 2009; Sani, 2017), can inform the design of interventions. Truly inclusive approaches integrate the needs of diverse audiences within cultural design on the practical, cognitive, emotional and cultural levels (Benente & Minucciani, 2019). Therefore, further exploration of the accessibility of museums and museum exhibits for all audience typologies including disabled, marginalised and disaffected audiences will provide important insights for this research.

The quality of cultural encounters is determined by the affective and cognitive response to the stimuli present. The effectiveness of the design and communication strategies proposed in the TMt in eliciting emotion and meaningful engagement is therefore a key focus of research. Each cultural encounter is, of course, shaped by the individual's subjectivity – including motivations, expectations and social context (Falk & Dierking, 2016) as well as the intuition, creativity and individuality of each visitor (Varutti, 2021). Therefore, an exploration of these strategies from the perspectives of both cultural professionals and audiences, can inform future work in facilitating transformative encounters that promote introspection and personal appropriation (Benente & Minucciani, 2022).

The TMt therefore motivates empirical research of the following three core constructs, which were the focus of our Stakeholder and Audience Analysis (Figure 2):

- **Public perceptions of the transformative nature of cultural heritage:** examining how audiences' prior experiences, motivations and identity shape beliefs and expectations about cultural heritage and museums (Falk, 2016). This is necessary for designing experiences that connect with broader audiences, including disaffected audiences and the 'non-public'. Moreover, preconceptions and expectations influence visitor experiences, including how they engage cognitively and emotionally with the exhibits.
- **Physical, cognitive and emotional accessibility:** identifying barriers that prevent audiences from meaningfully engaging with cultural heritage on a physical, cognitive and emotional level. Knowledge about different audiences' experiences in museum contexts can inform the inclusive design of prototypes for a variety of stimuli, experiences and narrative tools. The challenge of moving beyond traditional notions of accessibility (which often assume that all visitors should have the same experience) towards an approach that encourages diverse and personalised interactions requires deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences in the museum context and an audience-centred approach (Minucciani et al., 2024).
- **Effectiveness and feasibility of stakeholder communication strategies:** the design of experiences (e.g., immersive and interactive exhibits), the interpretative framework and means structured around the cultural artefacts, physical space and narrative techniques should be explored in terms of practical feasibility, audience perception and effectiveness in promoting transformative experiences.

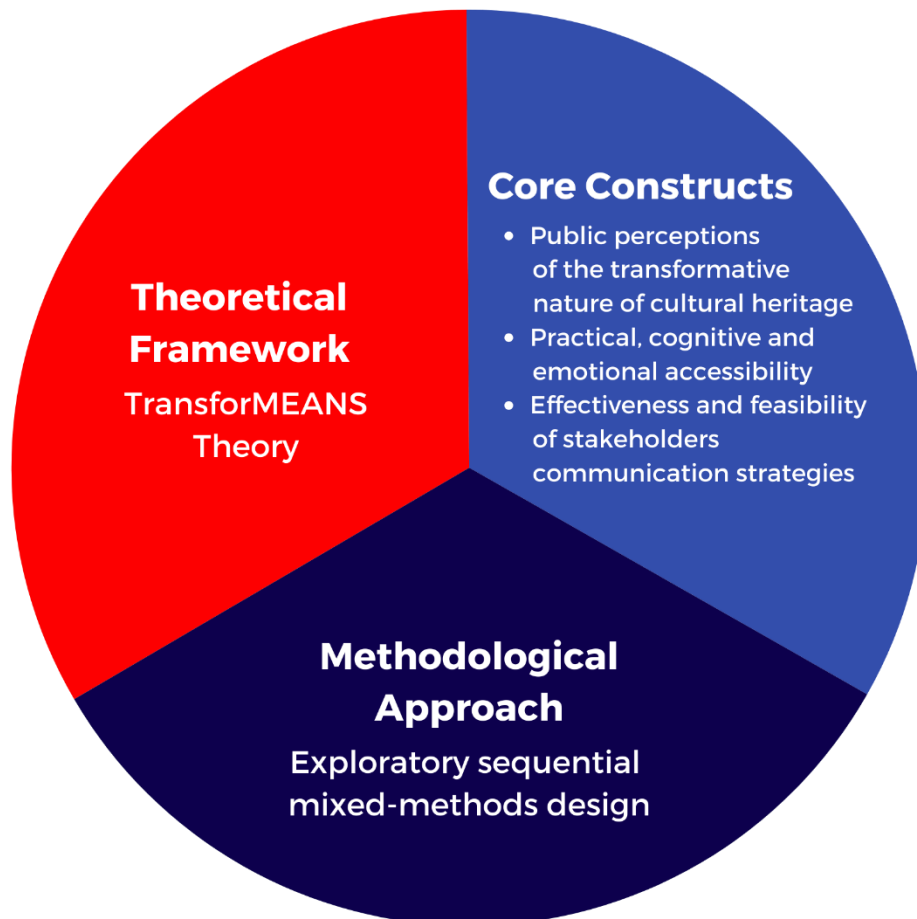
Figure 2. The core constructs associated with public engagement and encounters with cultural heritage



2.3 Methodological Approach

The methodological approach is the third key component of the conceptual framework for this Stakeholder and Audience Analysis (Figure 3). To investigate the core constructs outlined above, an **exploratory sequential mixed-methods research methodology** was developed and applied (see Section 3 - Methodology). In brief, we first conducted expert interviews from three relevant groups of specialists: museum and gallery professionals, academics in museology and museography, and specialists in psychology, neuroscience and sociology. Using insights from this stage, we designed an audience survey targeting the general public. These two stages, the expert interviews and the audience survey, make up the Stakeholder and Audience Exploratory Study. Both target groups (experts and public) provide complementary insights into each of the outlined core constructs.

Figure 3. The key components of the conceptual framework for the Stakeholder and Audience Analysis



3 Methodology

3.1 Design of the Stakeholder and Audience Preliminary and Exploratory Study

Based on the conceptual framework core constructs described above, the ES adopted a **mixed methods study design**, specifically **an exploratory sequential design** where the quantitative phase of data collection and analysis follows the qualitative phase of data collection and analysis (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). One of the main benefits of mixed methods studies is that they provide opportunities to qualitatively study contextual factors such as culture, perceptions, and beliefs, while also developing quantitative measures. In addition, as previously mentioned, we employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, systematically integrating qualitative and quantitative findings. Among the various integration strategies at the methods level, the **'building approach'** involves using data from one phase to shape the data collection process in the subsequent phase. In this study, **insights gained from stakeholder interviews, who are experts in the field (Step 1) informed the development of the questionnaire distributed to the public (Step 2)**. Incorporating mixed methods at different stages of instrument development enhances its fidelity by evaluating its appropriateness through both qualitative and quantitative data (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Therefore, **adopting an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was essential for improving the validity and reliability of the questionnaire used in the audience analysis.**

3.2 Identification and Recruitment of Participants

3.2.1 Step 1: Experts (Key Informant Interviews)

Based on the conceptual framework of the ES and in order to gather diverse and meaningful insights from experts, the participants for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were divided into three groups:

- **Group 1:** Museum and Gallery Professionals (e.g., curators, museum directors)
- **Group 2:** Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics (e.g., museologists, museographers)
- **Group 3:** Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists

Experts' recruitment process:

- KMOP prepared a consent form (Annex 1).
- KMOP and OPI-PIB teams developed an interview protocol aligned with the objectives of Task 2.1 (see section 3.3).
- The KMOP Ethical Committee reviewed and approved all relevant documents, ensuring that the interviews could be conducted by KMOP and OPI-PIB research teams. It was emphasized that all interviews would remain confidential, and no identifiable participant information would be included in any report or dataset, per GDPR principles.
- With the support of EMA and the KMOP and OPI-PIB networks, several experts were invited to participate in online interviews (e.g., via Zoom), **by applying a non-probability purposeful sampling technique**. After obtaining signed consent forms, **16 experts** who agreed to participate were categorized into the respective groups as follows:

Interviewer	Experts Group 1	Experts Group 2	Experts Group 3
KMOP	3	3	3
OPI-PIB	2	4	1
Country of residence	Belarus, Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden, UK	Greece, Italy, Malta, Poland	Greece, Poland, UK

- KMOP and OPI-PIB conducted the interviews between December 2024 and January 2025.

3.2.2 Step 2: General Public (Online Questionnaire)

As explained above, insights from stakeholder interviews informed the development of the questionnaire, which was then distributed to the public. The inclusion criteria required participants to be adults aged 18 or older, including both museum users and non-users, regardless of socioeconomic status, age, gender, immigration status, or place of residence.

Public's' recruitment process:

- KMOP, after receiving feedback from all META-MUSEUM partners, developed **an online anonymous questionnaire** aligned with the objectives of Task 2.1 (see section 3.3).
- KMOP prepared an online consent form (Annex 3).
- The KMOP Ethical Committee reviewed and approved all relevant documents, ensuring that the questionnaire could be distributed by all META-MUSEUM partners. The online questionnaire was anonymous and no identifiable participant information would be included in any report or dataset, per GDPR principles.
- With the support of META-MUSEUM partners, the link to the online questionnaire was posted on the META-MUSEUM website and shared on the partners' social media platforms, using a **non-probability convenience sampling technique**. After obtaining online consent forms, **176 individuals** who agreed to participate were categorized by country of residence as follows:

Country of residence	Total
Italy	43
Greece	26
Romania	25
Lithuania	16
Germany	12
Poland	12
The Netherlands	9
Sweden	6
France	5
Spain	4
United Kingdom	4
Belgium	3
Norway	3
Austria	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
Iceland	1
Republic of Moldova	1
Slovenia	1
Switzerland	1

Turkey	1
Total	176

- The questionnaire was available in February 2025.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Based on the TMT and the conceptual framework axes outlined above, customized data collection instruments were designed to address the objectives of T2.1 at each stage of the data collection process.

For the individual interviews with experts, KMOP and OPI-B developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Annex 2) to cover the following thematic areas:

- Introduction to the topic of the project & opening questions
- Cultural heritage accessibility
- Perception of the transformative nature of CH
- Barriers to access CH
- Factors impacting engagement with CH
- Facilitating emotional engagement with CH
- Thematic links to contemporary context and individual experience
- Information delivery and use of narrative
- Facilitating reflection and reducing anxiety
- Empathy and community
- Co-creation and participation
- Interpretation and personal appropriation of cultural heritage

Regarding public insights and based on the findings from expert interviews, KMOP, after receiving feedback from all META-MUSEUM partners, developed an anonymous online questionnaire (Annex 3). This questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions covering topics such as:

- Reasons for visiting museums
- Reasons for engaging with CH exhibitions
- Importance of CH in their lives
- Perceptions of museums as unwelcoming, unappealing, and not useful
- Expectations regarding museum experiences
- Topics of anxiety and fears related to museums
- Personal motives and perceptions about CH
- Role of technology in CH exhibitions
- Role of social media in CH experiences
- Museums' role in learning and shaping CH experiences
- Factors to enhance CH experiences

3.4 Data Analysis Plan

3.4.1 Individual Interviews

A content analysis was conducted using a **hybrid coding approach**, which combines both deductive and inductive coding techniques for qualitative data.

Content analysis is a descriptive qualitative method used to identify and analyze the occurrence of specific words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data, such as text. This approach enables researchers to quantify and interpret the frequency, meaning, and relationships between these elements (Elo, et al., 2014). Through this process, they can derive insights into the messages conveyed in the text, the author(s), the intended audience, and the cultural and historical context in which the text was produced.

A **code** in qualitative analysis, is a word or phrase that serves as a label for a segment of text (Coates, et al., 2021). For deductive coding, a predefined set of codes was utilized, based on the TMT framework and relevant literature, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Predefined set of codes for the content analysis of the interviews with experts

Category	Codes
Emotions & Psychological Status	Emotions, Empathy, Confidence, Resilience, Non-opposition to change, Resilience: commitment, control and challenge, Crisis (as opportunity), Self-esteem, Self-knowledge, Self-understanding, Sense of belonging, Inner sense of peace, Identity, Belonging, Cultural identity, Fears, Anxiety, Crisis
Empathy & Cognitive Processes	Positive, collaborative social self-concept, Transformative encounter/experience, Reflection, Curiosity, Recollection, Memorisation, Expectation, Surprise, Empathic bodily response, Affective emotional empathy vs. cognitive empathy as conscious self-identification in others, Unconscious response, Mirroring, Identification with someone, Recognition of diversity, Connection to the present, Narrative empathy (theory)
Inclusion & Accessibility	Inclusion, Accessibility, Barriers, Diversity, Right to culture, Disaffected public, Non-public
Cultural Heritage & Democratic Engagement	CH as democratic, Active participation, Involvement, Personal appropriation, Interpretation (of CH), Linear-communication (of CH), Top-down approach
Participatory & Co-creative Museum Models	Participatory museum, Co-creative proactive museum model, Active role of consumers, Visitor participation, Audience-centred approach, Interactive exhibits, Workshops, Community conversations, Community-led tours, Community sourcing, Co-curation, Community-led exhibitions, User Generated Contents
Narratives & Storytelling	Narratives, Stories, Storytelling, Contextualization, Representation (of diversity), Engagement, Connection, Interactive narrative, Multisensoriality (soundscapes, scents, and tactile elements), Personal stories, Individual experiences, CH communication as poetic, Openness to uncertainty, Plurality of meanings, Mental

Table 1. Predefined set of codes for the content analysis of the interviews with experts

Category	Codes
	associations, Digital media narrative, New media narrative, Real-time interactivity, Non-linear narrative, Narrative tone, content
Exhibit & Architectural Design	Exhibit and architectural design, Design sensitivity, Space (is never neutral), Communicative atmosphere, Scenography
Cognitive & Physiological Factors	Affective, emotional, and physiological states detection and recognition, Self-assessment tests, Physiological assessments to brain activity, Rational vs. neurophysiological responses, Neuroaesthetic experiments
Social Engagement	Tourism, Social engagement, Volunteering, Lifelong learning, Friend's associations, Social media visibility, Exhibitions and programmes designed for specific target groups
Digital & Virtual Experiences	Virtual museum, Virtual reality, Mixed reality
Visitor Experience	Visitor experience, Visitor representativity

Additionally, to capture experts' insights as accurately as possible, we recorded codes as they emerged from the interviews using **inductive coding**.

3.4.2 Online Questionnaire

The responses to the closed-ended questions were analysed using appropriate **descriptive statistics**, including percentage frequencies. Additionally, for selected responses, **inferential statistics**, specifically bivariate and multivariable analyses, were applied to identify associations and develop predictive models. For the statistical analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 28 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) was used, and the significance level (p-values) was set at 0.05. For the open-ended questions, a **simple content analysis** was conducted.

3.4.3 Limitations

The questionnaire data collection phase adopted a cross-sectional research design, which although it offers valuable insights by capturing data at a single point in time, it also comes with several limitations. One major drawback is the inability to establish causality; while associations between variables can be identified, it remains unclear whether one factor directly influences another. Additionally, cross-sectional studies provide only a snapshot view, meaning they do not account for changes over time. Other concerns include recall and response bias, where participants may provide inaccurate or socially desirable answers, and cohort effects, where observed differences might stem from generational or contextual influences rather than the variables being studied. Similarly, content analysis of qualitative data, while useful for identifying patterns and themes, has its own challenges. One of the most significant is subjectivity, as the interpretation of data can be influenced by the researcher's personal biases. To mitigate this limitation, member checking and interrater agreement techniques were applied. Additionally, analysing fragmented text or media content can lead to a loss of context, stripping away important nuances that shape meaning. Finally, non-probability sampling, which relies on non-random selection methods, also presents limitations. One of the key issues is selection bias, as participants are not chosen randomly, which

can result in an unrepresentative sample. For example, while aligning with **Bourdieu's profile of museum visitors**¹, the vast majority of participants in the online questionnaire were highly educated. This, in turn, affects generalizability, making it difficult to extend findings beyond the specific group studied. Another concern is the difficulty in assessing the reproducibility of findings, as the lack of randomization means that results cannot be easily replicated in different contexts.

4 Findings of the Stakeholder and Audience Preliminary and Exploratory Study

4.1 Individual Interviews with Experts

As mentioned above, 16 experts participated in the KIIs, providing insights into several thematic areas relevant to the T2.1 objectives. The key insights, supported by selected quotations, are described below.

4.1.1 Motivations for Visiting Cultural Heritage

Personal and Educational Motivations: A common theme among experts is that interest in CH is deeply **personal**. As a museologist highlights, ***“each visitor interprets cultural heritage through the lens of their own experiences”***. A professor of archaeology and museology supports this by noting that **museum attendance often starts in childhood and evolves into a lifelong habit**, while those who start attending later in life do so due to a personal desire for **connection with cultural heritage**. A neurophysiologist also reinforces that **personal interest in a specific topic** is a key motivator for engagement. **Education is another significant driver**. An architect emphasizes that children and students primarily visit museums for educational purposes, often as part of compulsory school programs. A curator echoes this sentiment, stating that visitors seek to **learn about history and understand the past in ways that relate to the present**. A professor of neurology adds that **people often prepare in advance, imagining what they will see**, which shapes their decision to visit a particular exhibit.

Social and Recreational Motivations: Beyond education, museums serve as spaces for **social interaction and leisure**. A museum consultant and a curator observed that museums facilitate **social bonding**, whether through family visits, workshops, or interactive activities. A museum director further elaborates that motivations differ based on how people visit: ***“those who come alone may seek intellectual curiosity, while families and friends engage for leisure and shared experiences”***. Additionally, museums are seen as **recreational spaces**, offering a **cultural escape** from daily routines. An architect notes that older visitors attend to fill their time, often pairing the visit with a café outing, while a museologist categorizes visitors into different types, such as **experience seekers, explorers, and facilitators accompanying others**. A museum director also acknowledges **seasonal variations**, with visitor numbers spiking during the Christmas period, demonstrating how cultural heritage sites are often tied to broader leisure patterns.

Tourism and Destination Experience: Tourism is another key motivation. An architect states that tourists frequently visit permanent exhibitions, considering certain museums as an **essential part of their visit to a city**. A director of a museum highlights that ***“25-30% of Danish museum***

¹ Bourdieu and Darbel wrote that individuals with high cultural capital (often from upper or middle classes) are more comfortable in museums, understanding and appreciating art in ways that align with institutional expectations Bourdieu, P., & Darbel, A. (1966). *L'amour de l'art: Les musées et leur public*. Les Éditions de Minuit.

visitors are tourists”, often drawn by specific historical periods, such as the Viking Age. A museologist categorizes some visitors as engaging in a **tick-box experience**, ensuring they see famous cultural sites during their travels.

Emotional and Transformative Experiences: Several experts emphasize the **emotional impact of CH exhibits**. A curator describes museums as **spaces of reflection**, where visitors process historical narratives and consider their relevance to the modern world. Museums are seen as **living memorials** that help individuals understand history and their place within it. A museologist further asserts that *“agency, curiosity, and personal growth drive many visitors, with emotions often playing a more significant role than knowledge alone”*. Similarly, a museum consultant notes that **museum visits can be transformative experiences**, offering moments of inspiration and personal discovery.

Challenges and Evolving Museum Strategies: While motivations for visiting CH sites are vast, **experts acknowledge that museums must adapt** to attract and retain diverse audiences. A professor of museology points out that museums need to improve how they **market and present content** to resonate with various communities. **Audience engagement is becoming increasingly pluralistic**, requiring museums to consider *“not only age demographics but also hobbies, identities, and social motivations”*. A director of a museum raises **concerns about museums prioritizing visitor numbers over experience quality**, *“often maintaining the status quo rather than diversifying their audience”*. **Gender preferences** also influence museum attendance, with men favouring cultural history museums (e.g., railway museums) and women gravitating toward art museums. There is an opportunity for museums to reshape these narratives and make exhibitions more inclusive.

4.1.2 Perception of the Transformative Nature of Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage and Identity Formation: The role of CH in fostering a **sense of identity and belonging** is a recurring theme among experts. A professor of archaeology and museology emphasizes that engagement with CH connects individuals to their communities, **countering the hyper-individualization of modern society**, especially post-COVID-19. Similarly, a sociologist states that CH helps people develop **self-understanding and cultural identity**, offering a tangible way to learn about history beyond theoretical study. For certain groups, CH can be particularly meaningful. A museologist notes that **visitors with shared ethnic or religious backgrounds** often experience deep emotional connections to their heritage, such as *“Jewish visitors engaging with sites linked to their history”*. A curator also discusses how CH fosters a **sense of continuity**, particularly in cities that have undergone destruction and rebuilding, strengthening connections to the past through **authentic architectural elements**.

Emotional and Psychological Impact: Experts agree that CH experiences can provoke **introspection, emotional connections, and even life-changing realizations**. An art therapist highlights how encounters with art bring subconscious emotions to the surface, helping visitors process thoughts and feelings in new ways. This is especially powerful in **facilitated group settings**, such as art workshops for individuals undergoing significant life challenges. A professor of neurology and a museum consultant both stress that the *“impact of a museum visit extends beyond the visit itself”*, often leading to further personal research and a deepened interest in the subject. A sociologist cites *“Fredrickson’s ‘Broaden & Build Theory of Positive Emotions’”*, explaining that *“joy and inspiration from CH encourage novel thoughts, enhancing personal, social, and psychological well-being”*. However, a curator warns that exhibitions dealing with difficult topics require careful handling *and “emotions should be restrained so they do not overwhelm visitors”*. A neurophysiologist expresses scepticism about the transformative power of CH experiences, implying that **their impact may be overstated in some cases**.

Museums as Spaces for Reflection and Societal Change: Many experts highlight CH's role in fostering **reflection and social progress**. A museum director describes **cultural heritage as a tool for reflection and societal change**, with some visitors feeling empowered to make **positive life changes** after engaging with exhibits. Similarly, a professor of museology notes that exhibitions addressing pressing social issues, such as **human rights or climate change**, can prompt visitors to **"consider actions they can take in their own lives"**. At the same time, CH institutions must navigate ethical concerns. A professor of archaeology and museology warns of potential harm when museums **fail to represent diverse experiences and identities**, leading to a disconnect between visitors and institutions. The issue of **decolonization of museum collections** is also raised, with ongoing debates surrounding the ethical presentation of artefacts taken from other countries.

The Transformative Nature of Learning and Discovery: For many visitors, CH provides a **sense of joy through learning and discovery**. An architect describes how **"this intellectual engagement reimburses you for your time."** A museum director similarly notes that some **exhibitions explicitly demonstrate how life changes**, reinforcing the dynamic and evolving nature of human history. For younger audiences, museum visits can be pivotal. A museum consultant suggests that **"early exposure to cultural heritage can shape future interests and career paths"**, making these experiences particularly important for youth development.

4.1.3 Barriers to Accessing Cultural Heritage

Geographical and Physical Barriers: One of the most commonly cited barriers is **physical distance**. A sociologist emphasizes that **proximity is a key factor**, even within a city, the effort required to visit a museum can be significant. For those living far from major cultural hubs, visiting CH sites is often not feasible unless incorporated into a broader trip, such as tourism. A curator points out that at least **national museums should be accessible to all regions**, but travel costs and time constraints deter visitors. **Poor transport connections and limited local infrastructure** were raised by a museologist as key issues. An architect highlights **"significant physical accessibility challenges, particularly for wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments, and individuals with neuropsychological conditions such as autism"**. Many museums **lack features such as tactile exhibits, subtitles, and seating areas**, making prolonged visits difficult.

Financial Barriers: A professor of archaeology and museology identifies **financial constraints** as one of the most significant barriers. However, they argue that it is often **"more about a resistance to paying for museum entry rather than an absolute inability to afford it"**. This view is supported by an architect, who observes that **museum attendance spikes on free admission days**, suggesting that the expectation that museums should be free plays a role in attendance patterns. A sociologist highlights that **financial barriers are particularly impactful for families** as ticket prices can add up quickly. **Cheaper family tickets or additional free entry days** could help improve accessibility.

Psychological and Social Barriers: Several experts note that psychological barriers, such as **feeling intimidated or out of place**, prevent people from visiting museums. A museologist states that some visitors experience **a fear of not understanding exhibits**, while museum security measures (such as entrance gates) can feel intimidating, reinforcing a sense of exclusivity. A museum director points out that **class-based differences affect engagement**. For example, refugees often feel disconnected from museums due to a lack of representation of their histories. They argue that museums must actively target these groups to increase their participation. A curator highlights **the lack of quality arts education** as a significant obstacle. Similarly, a professor of archaeology and museology notes that **"parents may hesitate to bring their children to museums because they lack the knowledge or confidence to explain exhibitions to them"**.

Engagement and Content Barriers: A curator and a museum consultant emphasize that **some exhibits lack interactivity**, making engagement difficult. A curator specifically notes that certain materials, such as **architectural drawings**, can be hard for the general public to connect with. A museum director identifies a broader challenge of **“making historical content relevant to modern audiences.”** Both an art psychotherapist and a curator note **public’s scepticism toward contemporary art**, with some visitors not considering it 'real art' or feeling uncertain about how to engage with it. However, facilitated discussions can help visitors find personal or emotional connections to these works. A curator raises concerns about the **internet as a barrier**, as many people now access cultural heritage online, reducing their motivation to visit museums in person. Additionally, shifting public expectation, **“where people increasingly prioritize entertainment and instant stimuli, mean that museums must compete with other leisure activities.”**

Information and Communication Barriers: A sociologist and a museologist highlight **poor promotion** as a key issue. Many free admission days are not well advertised, and essential visitor information (such as opening hours) is difficult to find. A museologist adds that **“exhibition promotion may not effectively reach certain audiences, such as seniors.”** A professor of museology argues that **badly written museum texts, filled with jargon and complex language**, create a barrier for many visitors. Simplified, accessible language would help broaden engagement.

4.1.4 Factors Impacting Engagement with Cultural Heritage (once at the exhibit)

Creating Points of Connection: A key factor in engagement is how visitors relate to the exhibit. According to a museologist, visitors often feel wary upon arrival due to the formality and unfamiliarity of museums. Exhibitions **should build on the audience's prior knowledge and reference points**, creating familiarity and comfort. **Designing inclusively, both spatially and conceptually, is essential.** For example, in a folk museum, helping visitors see how objects connect to their own ancestors enhances engagement.

Storytelling and Communication: A professor of archeology and museology highlights the **effectiveness of storytelling, humor, and familiar language.** The professor mentioned that **“the success of an archaeology-focused Instagram influencer, demonstrates how informal and personal narratives can attract new audiences”.** **Museums should incorporate elements of theatre** in their staging and communication styles to make exhibits more engaging.

Emotional and Psychological Factors: According to an art psychotherapist, an exhibition's **emotional impact primarily comes from the artworks themselves** and the artist’s message. A museologist points out that some visitors, especially those with personal or ancestral connections to historical events, may experience a range of emotions such as anxiety, grief, sadness, pride, relief, and admiration. **These emotional responses, though diverse, often result in a positive engagement with cultural heritage.**

Physical Environment and Interactive Elements: A museum consultant identifies several factors that affect engagement, such as the physical environment and architecture of the museum, the quality of interpretation and storytelling, the social interactions within the museum space, the use of digital and interactive elements, and **the overall museum experience**, including amenities like cafeterias. Similarly, a curator notes that **unique exhibits, such as 3D models or authentic historical elements** like original wooden ceilings, enhance engagement.

Personal Inclinations and Prior Knowledge: A museum director emphasizes that **engagement depends on personal inclinations**, whether emotional, intellectual, or social. A museologist adds that **audience "knowledge luggage"** plays a role, meaning that visitors with prior knowledge or a personal connection to the topic are more likely to engage deeply. **Generational**

differences and the type of museum (e.g., art vs. archaeological) also influence how visitors engage with museum exhibits.

Immersion and Authenticity: A neuropsychologist suggests that **exhibitions should strive for immersion**, creating an experience where visitors feel transported to another time and space rather than merely walking through a museum. A curator also underscores the importance of personal contact, interactive and technological elements, the presence of authentic objects and direct contact with historical sites and artefacts.

Measuring Engagement: Although engagement is widely studied, there are **no standardized psychometric tests to measure it**, according to a professor of archeology and museology. Visitor studies have been conducted in various contexts, using quantitative and qualitative research methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups. For example, the Smithsonian Museum in US has utilized **QR codes for visitor surveys**, allowing engagement to be assessed post-visit.

4.1.5 Facilitating Emotional Engagement with Cultural Heritage

Facilitating Emotional Engagement with Cultural Heritage: Emotional engagement in museum exhibitions is often an **organic process rather than an intentional design choice**. According to a museologist, **“while emotionally charged objects are not deliberately selected, they often emerge naturally during the curation process”**. The use of **personal narratives** helps visitors connect with the material on a human level. A professor of museology suggests that the **“slow museum” approach**, which limits the number of exhibits and explores them in depth, allows for deeper connections. **Immersive environments also facilitate engagement**, especially when exhibitions take place in familiar settings like historic homes.

Symbolic Narratives and Visual Representation: A museum director highlights **the power of symbolic personal narratives and visual representation in communicating emotion**. For example, an exhibition celebrating democracy in Cyprus incorporated a traditional dress symbolizing resistance and perseverance. Visitors connected with this symbol on different levels, with interpretations varying based on personal and cultural perspectives. An architect emphasizes that both curators and museographers strive to **evoke specific emotions through space design, lighting, and scenography**. Emotional impact is strongest when exhibits have an inherent emotional charge, but **scenography and interactive elements can enhance engagement** for less striking artefacts.

Creating Comfort and Intimacy: A curator stresses the importance of **creating a welcoming and comfortable space**. A museum director adds that **experiencing history firsthand**, through research, excavation sites, and live explanations, deepens emotional engagement. Exhibitions held in former residences of historical figures, such as the Johannes Larson exhibition, allow visitors to feel a close personal connection to the past. **“If visitors feel confident and comfortable interpreting the material themselves, their engagement extends beyond the museum visit”**.

Facilitation and Interaction: an art psychotherapist underscores the role of facilitation and discussion in breaking emotional barriers. She mentioned that **“guided tours that encourage visitors to reflect on their experiences (“How does this make you feel?”) promote deeper engagement.”** **Participatory activities**, such as workshops and creative exercises, also enhance emotional connections. A sociologist highlights **the effectiveness of videos in fostering personal connections, especially when they document human-centred stories such as archaeological digs**. It was highlighted that **small-scale, personalized experiences tend to be more effective than large-scale interventions (facilitated experiential learning)**.

Interpretation and Storytelling: According to a museum consultant, **effective storytelling taps into universal emotions**, fostering reflection and social interaction. A curator notes that

showcasing objects contributed by local residents, as in the Museum of Praga, strengthens community bonds. A museum director also emphasizes the **role of scenography, light design, and music** in shaping emotional responses, as demonstrated in exhibitions featuring medieval sculptures.

Ethical Considerations in Emotional Engagement: A museologist cautions against overwhelming visitors with excessively strong emotions, particularly in exhibitions addressing traumatic histories such as genocide. **Exhibitions should balance emotional impact with ethical responsibility**, avoiding graphic imagery, limiting soundscapes, and allowing visitors to engage at their own pace. Authentic witness statements and carefully curated photographs help narrate history without re-victimizing the viewer.

Immersion and Sensory Experience: A neuropsychologist highlights **the role of immersive experiences in fostering emotional engagement**. Multisensory approaches, such as olfactory tours and interactive installations, can enhance the visitor's emotional response. However, **strong sensory stimuli must be used thoughtfully**, as certain smells and sounds can trigger distress rather than engagement.

4.1.6 Use of Narrative, Technology and Information Delivery

Power of Narrative in Museums: Almost all experts reported that **narrative plays an important role in engaging museum audiences, particularly through personal stories** that allow visitors to connect with historical and cultural material. The participants museologists emphasize the effectiveness of storytelling in deepening emotional engagement. It was mentioned that ***“personal narratives help humanize exhibitions and make abstract historical events more tangible and relatable”***.

Creating Immersive and Interactive Museum Experiences: A professor of archaeology and museology highlights the **contrast between traditional museum settings and everyday life**, which is filled with immersive experiences. Some experts reported that **museums that incorporate interactive and immersive elements**, such as ephemeral stage interpretations or life-size reconstructions, **encourage cognitive engagement and deeper emotional connections**. For example, a museologist mentioned that an Italian museum used inscribed walls and short, dramatic performances to evoke strong emotions, leading visitors to explore archaeological artefacts with fresh perspectives.

Balancing Technology and Authenticity: Experts reported that museums increasingly integrate technology such as virtual reality (VR), projections, and 3D holograms to enhance visitor experiences. For example, in the Acropolis Museum, representations of how historical structures originally appeared provide an enriched perspective. However, curators and museum directors **caution against overshadowing authentic artefacts with digital enhancements**. It was mentioned that ***“technology should complement traditional exhibits, not replace them”***.

Historical Sites as Anchors for Digital Narratives: Historical sites serve as compelling backdrops for museum narratives. A museum director described as example an exhibition centred on a landmark Cypriot hotel used VR to recreate significant national events, allowing visitors to experience moments of history firsthand. Similarly, a forthcoming exhibition on the division of Cyprus immerses visitors through a narrow corridor featuring life-sized images and recorded eyewitness testimonies, culminating in a VR representation of the present-day Green Line. It was emphasized that these methods reinforce emotional and intellectual engagement.

The Role of Social Media and Digital Tools: Curators who participated in the study, recognize the **growing importance of social media in museum engagement**. Platforms like Instagram provide museums with a means to reach global audiences. For example, it was mentioned that the

TATE Modern's social media strategy, which features relatable, informal content filmed on smartphones, fosters a sense of accessibility. However, experts reported that according to available data, QR codes, despite maintaining a clean aesthetic in exhibitions, are often underutilized by visitors.

The Impact of Multisensory and Tactile Experiences: Several experts reported that **museums that integrate multisensory elements enhance accessibility and engagement**. A museum director mentioned that *“open-air museums, recreate historical settings complete with authentic sounds and smells, catering to diverse visitors, including those with dementia”*. Another example was the Carl Nielsen Museum effectively combined technology with tactile experiences, such as turning on radios to hear period music, making the intangible nature of music more tangible.

Challenges and Limitations of Technology: Experts mentioned that while technology can enhance museum experiences, **excessive reliance on digital elements can lead to visitor disengagement**. The Hans Christian Andersen Museum, for example, overused technology, causing visitors to feel lost in the exhibition. Experts emphasize that technology should serve as a tool to enhance storytelling rather than act as a substitute for human-centred narratives. Additionally, **concerns about isolating visitors through individual screen-based experiences**, such as mandatory audio guides, suggest that technology should support, rather than dictate, visitor engagement.

Storytelling as a Universal Communication Tool: Several experts advocate for **storytelling as a fundamental method of information delivery**. Museums are not merely repositories of artefacts but platforms for broader cultural dialogue. **Storytelling fosters connections across generations and cultures, allowing visitors to interpret history through multiple perspectives**. Examples provided by the experts include the Museum of Praga, where objects contributed by local residents strengthen community ties, and an exhibition that facilitated intergenerational connections between descendants of Holocaust survivors.

4.1.7 Prompting Reflection and Reducing Anxiety

Art and Emotional Responses: According to a professor of neurology, *“art enhances quality of life through aesthetic, cognitive, and reflective processes”*, yet it does not universally have a calming effect. Instead, **it can provoke alertness or even agitation**, manifesting in physical responses such as an increased pulse or blood pressure. This suggests that **while art can be a source of introspection, its impact on anxiety reduction is not guaranteed**. On the contrary, an art psychotherapist argues **that museum workshops have a significant potential to reduce anxiety**. The expert observed that participants who arrived with high levels of anxiety often felt calmer by the end of the session. The interviewee reported that *“this effect was attributed to the opportunity to engage with something new and to socialize, highlighting the importance of social interaction in mitigating stress”*.

Museums as Safe and Reflective Spaces: A museum consultant underscores the role of **museums as safe environments that facilitate social interaction**. This sense of security allows visitors to engage more deeply with both the exhibits and fellow visitors, reinforcing the idea that museums provide spaces for comfort and reflection. Building on this, a curator highlights **how reflection is fostered through emotionally resonant stories**, particularly those centred around resilience during crises. For example, exhibits on Warsaw's destruction and rebuilding evoke strong emotions, prompting visitors to engage in profound contemplation. Further, a museum director discusses *“how exhibitions create reflective spaces by linking past events to present-day relevance”*. Emotional settings within museums not only encourage contemplation but also ensure a **sense of security** for visitors. The director further emphasizes that **imagination is a key factor**

for visitor engagement, reinforcing the idea that a **human-centred experience is fundamental to reflection.**

Considerations for Visitor Experience: A museologist echoes this sentiment by emphasizing **the importance of connecting the past with the present.** They also stress **the need to protect visitors from distressing content.** For example, museums carefully curate exhibits to **prevent traumatization** by avoiding enlarged photos of victims, concealing graphic images that require effort to view, and considering the psychological impact of exhibits, especially on children. Another curator advocates for **interactive experiences**, stressing that museum **visits should be dialogues rather than passive encounters.** They criticize guides who defer questions, arguing that visitors should be encouraged to ask and receive answers in real-time to foster engagement and reflection.

Skepticism About Anxiety Reduction: Despite these positive perspectives, a neuropsychologist expresses skepticism regarding a direct link between cultural heritage experiences and anxiety reduction. This viewpoint suggests that while museums can provide reflective spaces, their impact on **stress reduction may be more nuanced and dependent on individual experiences.**

4.1.8 Empathy and Community (cultural heritage exhibits uniting or divisive)

Approaches to Presenting History: As an example, a museologist contrasts two museum approaches: the Topography of Terrors (Berlin), which presents raw archival material without interpretation, allowing visitors to draw their own conclusions, versus the House of Terror (Budapest), which employs a theatrical approach with a clear anti-communist agenda. **The participant prefers a factual, unemotional approach, using small human stories to foster emotional connection while distancing political bias.** The interviewee reported that this approach was applied in exhibitions on “1821 and 1922 in Chios”, which remained non-divisive despite a majority Turkish audience, evidenced by the lack of complaints. However, in exhibitions focusing on artistic expression, such as LGBT communities, emotional intensity is often intentional and appropriate. A professor of museology asserts that **all museums inherently carry an ideological position**, even when striving for objectivity. Museums reflect their societal context, as seen in the contrast between museums in large cities such as New York City and those in smaller towns, such as creationist museums. A museum director states that due to a complex national history, **exhibitions should be designed to let visitors form their own interpretations.** This aligns with an architect's view that **“while museums may not change the minds of conspiracy theorists, they can influence those who are undecided, highlight lesser-known truths, and present multiple perspectives.”** On the other hand, some experts mentioned that there is also **institutional pressure for some historical sites to be presented in an apolitical manner.** A sociologist argues that displaying artefacts from politically significant events does not inherently mean the museum is taking a political stance. Visiting emotionally charged exhibits does not necessarily divide visitors, it can **create dialogue and shared reflection, particularly among individuals with different national backgrounds.**

Museums as Spaces for Connection and Dialogue: A museum consultant highlights the role of museums in fostering community by providing a safe space for social interaction. Similarly, a curator describes **how museums facilitate empathy** by showcasing shared struggles and achievements, which unite communities through their historical contributions. A museum director reinforces this idea, noting that exhibitions often bring visitors together through **shared emotional experiences.** Public programs linked to exhibits further encourage community dialogue. Another museologist advocates for **direct community involvement**, citing examples of museums collaborating with youth groups and forming citizen assemblies. However, some exhibits seem to walk the line between unity and division: a museologist discussing Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish histories notes that **museums can help build bridges by focusing on connecting themes**, such as cuisine, rather than violent histories. A curator supports this, emphasizing how museum

experiences can foster understanding between diverse communities. Nevertheless, a neuropsychologist suggests that whether cultural heritage exhibits are uniting or divisive depends on presentation and perception, visitors often arrive with preconceived notions, making it unlikely that a museum visit will change deeply held beliefs. The interviewee noted that **“people whose views are not represented by the museum may choose not to visit at all.”** However, for those who are more open-minded, **museums provide an opportunity for critical thinking.** Unlike public monuments, which often serve political agendas, **museums offer a more nuanced and balanced view of history.** If a public monument is controversial, a museum can provide the context needed for a more comprehensive understanding.

4.1.9 Interpretation and Personal Appropriation of Cultural Heritage

Emotional Engagement and Personal Connection: A museologist emphasized **the power of emotional engagement, using the example of an audio clip of a grandmother singing a local song.** This intervention was particularly effective because the song's richness of information made it relatable, reminding viewers that historical figures were people like them. An art psychotherapist further noted that **“juxtaposing ancient objects with contemporary equivalents fosters deeper connections by allowing viewers to relate historical artefacts to their own lives”.** A curator discussed **thematic curation over chronological displays,** which encourages creative interpretation. This approach allows different artworks and historical narratives to dialogue with each other, enabling visitors to form **personal interpretations.** A museum consultant highlighted **the shift in the last 30 years toward interpretation over information,** reinforcing the importance of **individual experiences** in museum visits.

Encouraging Critical Thinking and Multiple Perspectives: A professor of museology stressed that the way narratives are constructed around objects determines whether critical thinking and personal appropriation are encouraged. **The choice of questions posed, the path through the exhibit, and the connections made between objects influence visitors' experiences.** A museum director provided an example from a museum, where exhibition texts incorporated voices of diverse individuals, including travellers, soldiers, students, and artists, to maintain a neutral stance while allowing visitors to interpret events for themselves. Similarly, an architect noted that **“while exhibitions are often perceived as authoritative, they should be designed to allow different responses rather than dictate a singular meaning.”**

Social Media and Public Engagement: A curator described how a museum's interpretation department **uses social media to invite visitor interpretations, rather than instructing them on how they should feel about artworks.** By posting questions such as *“How does this artwork make you feel?”*, museums encourage public engagement and emotional connection through shared responses. A museum director and a curator highlighted **efforts to involve communities in exhibitions by working with descendants of historical figures or communities linked to specific events.** This approach creates authentic emotional engagement, allowing people to confront their preconceived images when they step into historical spaces.

Technology and Personalized Experiences: A museologist proposed that **AI-driven museum experiences could help tailor exhibits to visitors' backgrounds and interests, enhancing personal engagement.** This technological approach would ensure that visitors interact with cultural heritage in a way that feels relevant and meaningful to them.

4.1.10 Challenges and Opportunities in Measuring Visitors' Experiences.

Several participants highlighted the significant challenges in measuring visitor experience. An architect emphasized **the limitations of visitor surveys,** pointing out that broad generalizations can

oversimplify creative work and experiential nuances. The interviewee cautioned that an **overreliance on study results could restrict design flexibility and create friction with museologists**, who might treat findings, such as the recommendation against using white text on a black background for readability, as rigid guidelines. While acknowledging the importance of visitor feedback, the architect advocated for a **more inclusive approach**, incorporating discussions with a diverse board representing marginalized and varied audience groups. This, the participant suggested, would enable a more balanced and nuanced integration of user insights into design decisions.

A professor of neurology noted the **existence of neurophysiological measurements² for assessing visitor engagement but stressed the difficulty in determining whether physiological responses to exhibits are transient or long-lasting.**

Meanwhile, an art psychotherapist shared insights from an ongoing arts-based research project exploring "response art" as a clinical and supervisory tool for psychotherapists, with a particular focus on supporting mental health professionals. The interviewee also referenced a prior initiative, a museum-based arts, social, and educational program designed for healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic of **cultural prescribing³** (Bekkering, et al. 2023; Culture on Prescription, 2025) was also discussed and its challenges in many countries.

Finally, a neuropsychologist outlined key challenges in measuring visitor engagement through physiological responses in cultural heritage settings. These include:

- Individual variability: Baseline physiological responses differ across individuals, making comparisons difficult.
- Standardization: Instead of comparing individuals, responses should be assessed within the same person across different contexts.
- Movement interference: Visitors' physical activity can introduce noise into physiological data.
- Selecting suitable indicators: General measures of arousal, such as skin conductance or heart rate variability, may be more reliable than attempts to quantify specific emotions.
- Equipment constraints: Non-invasive tools like wristbands or finger sensors are preferable to full-body electrode setups.
- Data interpretation: Differentiating museum-related responses from other physiological influences remains a significant challenge.

Overall, the discussion with almost all experts underscored **the complexities of capturing visitor experience through both subjective and objective means, emphasizing the need for a thoughtful, interdisciplinary approach.**

²Portable EEGs to record electrical impulses in the brain; Wireless sensors to monitor heart rate that can be worn over extended periods; [Electrical] skin resistance can be measured using wireless wearable sensors. This shows autonomous nervous system responses (sympathetic and parasympathetic systems); Vascular resistance can be measured which indicates arousal responses; Plethysmography [measures changes in blood flow / volume to specific regions of the body or the brain]

³ In culture-based prescribing a person is referred by a clinical professional to an arts or cultural activity aimed at improving mental health and well-being.

4.2 Online Questionnaire with the General Public.

4.2.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The demographic data presented in Table 2 highlights key characteristics of the surveyed population. The majority of respondents are **female (55.2%)**, with males making up 38.3% and a small percentage identifying as "Other" (1.1%) or preferring not to disclose their gender (2.2%). **The mean, median, and mode age of the participants were 45.2, 46, and 48 years**, respectively (SD=13.1). Regarding education, the **largest group holds a doctoral degree or higher (39.9%)**, followed closely by those with a master's degree (38.3%). A smaller portion has a college or bachelor's degree (10.9%), while others have incomplete college education (3.8%), only a high school diploma (2.2%), or another form of education (1.6%). **Most respondents are employed (75.4%)**, with additional representation from self-employed individuals (10.4%), students (4.4%), retirees (2.7%), and a small fraction identifying under "Other" (1.1%). In terms of residence, **an overwhelming majority live in a city (83%)**, with smaller groups residing in towns or suburbs (9.8%) and rural areas (3.8%).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic	N	Percentage
Gender		
Female	101	55.2%
Male	70	38.3%
Other	2	1.1%
Prefer not to say	4	2.2%
Educational Level		
College / Bachelor's Degree	20	10.9%
Doctoral Degree or Higher	73	39.9%
High School / Secondary	4	2.2%
Incomplete College / Bachelor's	7	3.8%
Master's Degree	70	38.3%
Other	3	1.6%
Employment Status		
Employed	138	75.4%
Other	2	1.1%
Retired	5	2.7%
Self-employed	19	10.4%
Student	8	4.4%
Place of residence		
City	152	83%
Rural area	7	3.8%
Town / suburbs	18	9.8%
Measure of tendency		
	Age (in years)	Standard Deviation
Mean	45.2	13.1
Median	46	13.1
Mode	48	13.1

4.2.2 Museum Visitation Profile of the Sample

A significant majority of respondents visit museums with some regularity, with 53% indicating they visit "sometimes" and 42.1% reporting they visit "often" (Table 3). Only a very small fraction (1.6%) stated they never visit museums, suggesting strong engagement with cultural

institutions. On the other hand, museum visits are not confined to a single context. **While 68.9% typically visit museums in their hometown or near their place of residence, an even larger share do so while traveling.** A notable 77.6% visit museums when traveling within their country, and an even higher percentage, 82.5%, engage with museums when traveling abroad. This suggests that **museums are perceived as key cultural attractions during travel experiences**, possibly linked to an interest in exploring new cultures and histories.

The motivations for engaging with cultural content reflect a strong intellectual and educational drive. **The most cited reason is to learn about the cultural heritage of another country (77%), followed closely by learning about their own country’s cultural heritage (71.6%). Nearly half (49.2%) express an interest in learning about European cultural heritage specifically, indicating a broader appreciation for transnational historical narratives.** Beyond cultural learning, other significant motivations include **intellectual stimulation (67.2%)** and **emotionally engaging experiences (56.8%)**, suggesting that **visitors seek both cognitive enrichment and meaningful personal connections through cultural experiences.** Social and recreational factors also play a role, but to a lesser extent. While 44.8% visit museums to spend time with family or friends, and 37.7% to see an important touristic site, **only 29.5% see museum visits as an escape from daily routine.** This suggests that while museums serve as social and leisure spaces, they are **primarily valued for their educational and thought-provoking experiences** rather than as simple entertainment venues.

Substantial **portion of respondents engage online with cultural content on a weekly basis or more (44.8%),** indicating a strong and consistent interest in digital cultural experiences. Additionally, 19.7% interact with cultural content monthly, while 26.8% do so less than once a month, suggesting that while cultural engagement is common, the frequency varies.

Table 3. Museum visitation factors of the participants

Profile Factor	N	Percentage
Frequency of visits		
Never	3	1.6%
Often	77	42.1%
Sometimes	97	53.0%
I Usually visit....		
In my hometown or near place of permanent residence	126	68.9%
When travelling within my country of residence	142	77.6%
When travelling abroad	151	82.5%
Main reasons to engage with cultural content		
To learn about the cultural heritage of my country	131	71.6%
To learn about the cultural heritage of another country	141	77.0%
To learn about European cultural heritage	90	49.2%
To learn about something that would be relevant to my personal life	78	42.6%
Look for intellectual stimulation	123	67.2%
Look for emotionally engaging experience	104	56.8%
To spend time with my family/friends/other people	82	44.8%
To get away from the routine of my daily life	54	29.5%
To see an important touristic site	69	37.7%
Frequency of engaging cultural content online⁴		
Less than monthly	49	26.8%

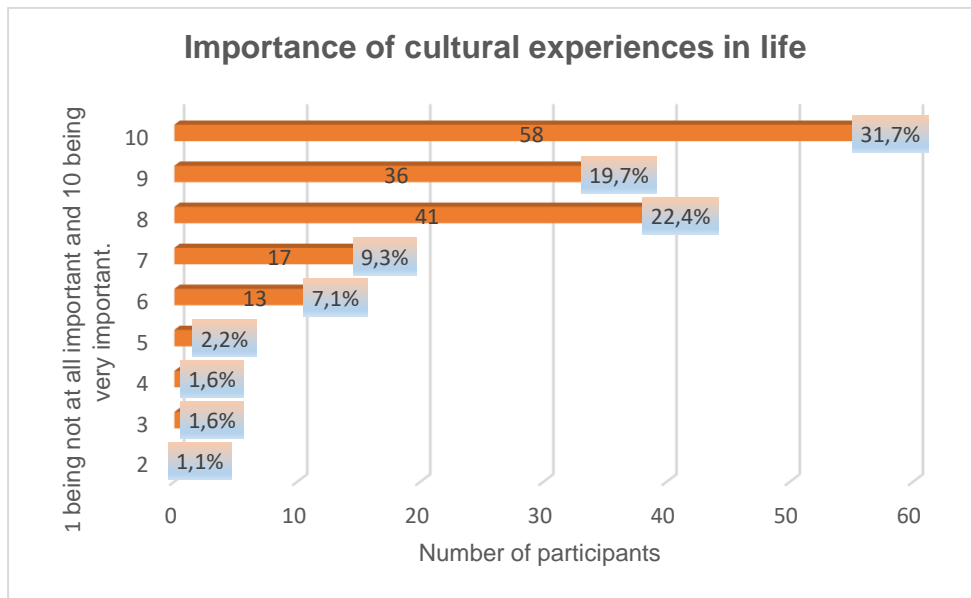
⁴ e.g., following arts or history social media accounts, following contemporary artists, viewing cultural exhibitions online.

Monthly	36	19.7%
Weekly (or more)	82	44.8%
Never	10	5.5%

4.2.3 Importance of Cultural Experiences in Participants' Lives

The data in Figure 4 reveal a strong appreciation for cultural experiences among respondents. **A significant majority rated cultural experiences as highly important in their lives, with 31.7% selecting 10 (very important) and 19.7% choosing 9 score.** Additionally, 22.4% rated it an 8, further emphasizing a strong inclination toward valuing cultural engagement. Very few respondents find cultural experiences unimportant, indicating strong overall engagement with cultural activities.

Figure 4. The importance of cultural experiences in participants' lives



4.2.4 Negative Perceptions of Museums and/or Art Galleries

The data in Table 4 indicate that only about **13% of respondents perceive museums as unwelcoming, uncomfortable, unappealing, or not useful, suggesting that the vast majority have a positive or at least neutral perception of these institutions.** While this figure is relatively low, understanding these concerns can help museums enhance their inclusivity, accessibility, and engagement strategies. The most cited issue is a general feeling that museums are **unwelcoming (6%)**, and specific concerns include overcrowding (3%), discomfort (2.2%), and a lack of child-friendly spaces (1.6%). The secondly cited as negative perception was the feeling that museums are unappealing (4.4%), with main reason the lack of interactive exhibits (3.3%) which contributes to this perception, emphasizing the need for more dynamic and participatory museum experiences.

Table 4. Participants' negative perceptions of museums and/or art galleries

Negative Perception	N	Percentage
Perceiving museums as unwelcoming	11	6%
Too crowded	6	3%
Not child friendly	3	1.8%
I have a disability	2	1.2%
Perceiving museums as uncomfortable	4	2.2%
I feel boredom and fatigue	2	1.1%
Not linguist inclusive	1	0.5%
Rules can make you feel not welcome	1	0.5%
Perceiving museums as unappealing	8	4.4%
The content is not interesting to me	2	1.1%
The content is not presented in an engaging/interactive way	6	3.3%
Perceiving museums as not useful	5	2.6%
The content is not relevant to my daily life	1	0.5%
The exhibitions do not relate to my culture or personal experiences	2	1.1%
Visting museums does not help me achieve my goals	1	0.5%
Do not provide opportunities to socialize	1	0.5%

4.2.5 Expected Visitor Experiences in Museums and/or Art Galleries

When visitors step into a museum, they bring with them a variety of expectations, shaped by personal interests, cultural backgrounds, and emotional needs. The data depicted in Table 5 below gives a clear insight into what people seek when they visit museums and how these institutions can cater to diverse expectations.

The overwhelming majority of visitors (90.7%) express a strong desire to enhance their knowledge, whether in the fields of art, history, science, or technology. This suggests that museums remain highly valued as educational institutions. Exhibitions that provide in-depth information, interactive displays, and well-researched content will be particularly appealing to this group. Additionally, **67.2% of visitors want to learn about their national or cultural heritage**, while 25.7% seek knowledge about their personal or family history. **This emphasizes the role of museums in shaping collective identities rather than individual ones.** Curating exhibitions that blend historical narratives with personal storytelling can bridge the gap between national history and individual experience.

Beyond learning, visitors also look for an emotional connection. **A 57.4% of the participants desire to feel connected to something larger than themselves**, whether it be a historical event, a cultural movement, or a profound work of art. Museums that offer immersive storytelling, thought-provoking exhibitions, or awe-inspiring artefacts can help fulfill this expectation. On the other hand, **27.3% of visitors hope to feel a sense of belonging, indicating that museums should also foster inclusive environments.**

For many, a museum visit is about tranquillity. **With 42.6% seeking calm and relaxation, museums are seen as spaces where people can momentarily escape the chaos of everyday life.** Quiet galleries, serene installations, and spaces for contemplation can enhance this experience. Further, **42.1% of visitors wish to escape their routine, suggesting that museums should focus on creating engaging, novel experiences that provide a temporary departure from the mundane.** Rotating exhibitions, thematic events, and creative spaces can help keep the museum visit fresh and exciting.

Nearly half of visitors (49.7%) want to reflect on important contemporary issues. This indicates that museums are not just about the past, they are platforms for dialogue and critical thinking about today's world. Exhibitions that tackle social, political, or environmental themes can engage this audience effectively, sparking discussion and awareness.

While many visitors enjoy passive learning, a notable 25.7% seek active participation through interactive exhibitions, games, participatory artworks, or workshops. This trend aligns with modern museum practices that emphasize engagement and experiential learning. Similarly, 33.9% value interactions with knowledgeable experts. Guided tours, talks, and opportunities to converse with museum staff enhance the learning experience and provide deeper insights that static exhibits may not offer.

When participants were asked to prioritize what they value most in a museum experience, their top three preferences were: first, "Enhancing my knowledge, such as in the arts, history, science, or technology"; second, "Learning about my national or cultural heritage and history"; and third, "Feeling a connection to something larger than myself." Conversely, the lowest priority was "Active participation, such as interactive exhibitions, games, participatory artworks, or workshops."

Table 5. Expected visitor experiences in museums and/or art galleries

Expected Experiences	N	Percentage
Enhance my knowledge, e.g., about the arts, history, science or technology	166	90.7%
Learn about my personal/family heritage and history	47	25.7%
Learn about my national/cultural heritage and history	123	67.2%
Feel a sense of belonging	50	27.3%
Feel a connection to something larger than myself, e.g. feelings of awe	105	57.4%
Feel calm and relaxed	78	42.6%
Escape from the routine of my daily life	77	42.1%
Reflect on important contemporary issues	91	49.7%
Participate actively, e.g., interactive exhibitions, games, participatory artworks or workshops	47	25.7%
Interact with knowledgeable experts, e.g., museum staff, guided tours, talks	62	33.9%

4.2.6 Public's Contemporary Fears

Understanding the contemporary fears of museum visitors provides insight into the anxieties that shape their daily lives and broader societal concerns. Based on the collected data (Table 6), the levels of anxiety vary across different topics, revealing distinct patterns in personal, economic, and global fears.

The highest levels of anxiety were associated with broad societal and global issues. Global war scored the highest mean anxiety level (7.6, SD = 2.4), indicating that museum visitors experience significant distress about worldwide events, crises, or instability. Similarly, climate change (M = 7.1, SD = 2.7) emerged as a major source of anxiety, suggesting that environmental uncertainty and sustainability are pressing worries for the respondents.

Economic difficulties (M = 6.4, SD = 2.6) and inequalities (M = 6.4, SD = 2.9) ranked among the top concerns, reflecting widespread financial insecurity and societal disparities. Visitors also expressed significant anxiety about their children's future (M = 6.2, SD = 3.3), indicating that intergenerational well-being is a significant stressor.

Personal health problems (M = 5.9, SD = 2.8) and **ageing** (M = 5.3, SD = 2.7) show moderate anxiety levels, suggesting that visitors are concerned about their well-being but possibly view these as manageable issues. The prospect of a second pandemic (M = 5.3, SD = 2.7) remains a relevant concern, likely influenced by recent global health crises.

Visitors reported moderate anxiety about their job (M = 5.8, SD = 2.2) and failure to realize themselves (M = 5.2, SD = 3.1). This suggests that while career and self-fulfillment remain important, they are not the most dominant fears compared to broader societal issues.

The lowest levels of anxiety were recorded for loneliness (M = 4.5, SD = 2.9), sentimental or affective relationship problems (M = 4.7, SD = 2.8), and too fast technological development (M = 5.2, SD = 2.9). While these issues do cause stress for some individuals, they appear to be less of a widespread concern among the respondents.

Table 6. Public’s contemporary fears

Topic that can cause anxiety Score: 1 (not at all anxious) to 10 (extremely anxious)	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
My children’s future	6.2	3.3
My job	5.8	2.2
Economic difficulties	6.4	2.6
Personal health problems	5.9	2.8
Loneliness	4.5	2.9
Ageing	5.3	2.7
Sentimental or affective relationship problem	4.7	2.8
Failure to realize myself	5.2	3.1
Climate change	7.1	2.7
Global war	7.6	2.4
A second pandemic	5.3	2.7
Too fast technological development	5.2	2.9
Inequalities	6.4	2.9

4.2.7 Self-confidence and Confidence in Others

The data in figures 4 to 7 provide insights into participants' self-confidence and confidence in others when it comes to coping with change, problem-solving in their community, global issues, and personal agency.

Self-Confidence (Figures 4, 5): Participants generally feel confident in their ability to cope with change. A majority (54.6% agree, 19.7% strongly agree) express positive self-assessment in handling change, while only a small fraction (6.5%) disagrees. Similarly, a strong belief in personal agency is evident, with 49.7% agreeing and 11.5% strongly agreeing that they have the power to make a difference. However, a notable portion (23.5%) is uncertain about their ability to make a difference.

Confidence in Others (Figures 6, 7): In contrast, confidence in others, both at the local and global level, is remarkably lower. While 30.1% agree that people in their community will help solve local problems, a significant portion (26.2% disagree, 8.7% strongly disagree) expresses skepticism, and nearly a third (29%) are uncertain. Confidence in global problem-solving is even lower, with only 21.3% agreeing and 2.7% strongly agreeing, while 30.6% disagree and 13.1% strongly disagree. Uncertainty is also high (29%).

Figure 4. I feel confident in my ability to cope with change

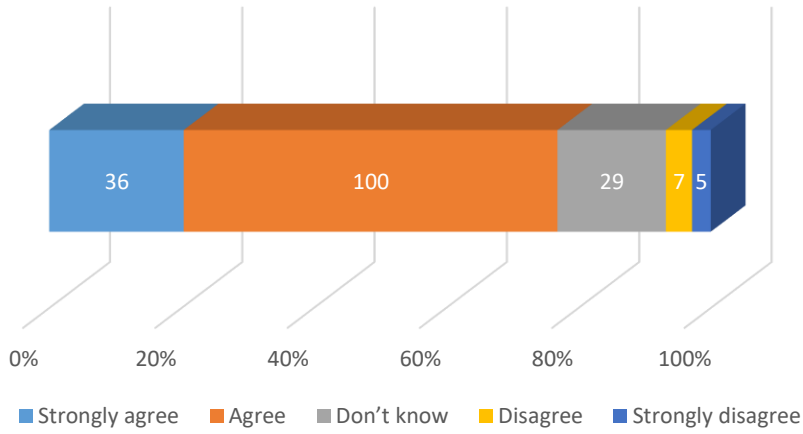


Figure 5. I believe I have the power to make a difference

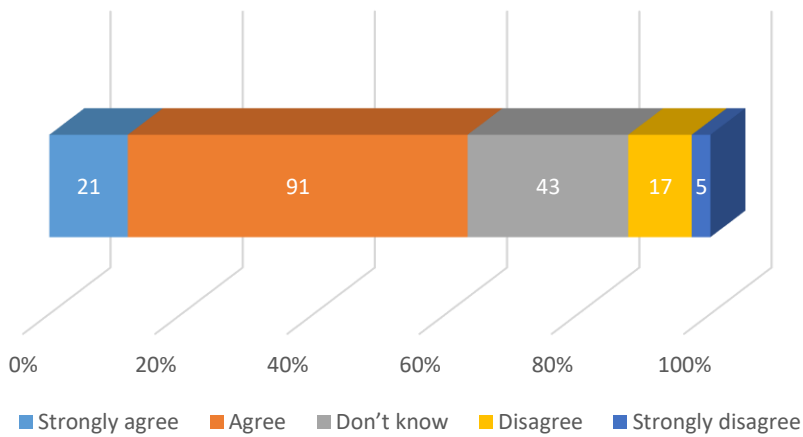


Figure 6. I feel confident that people in my community / local region will contribute towards solving local problems

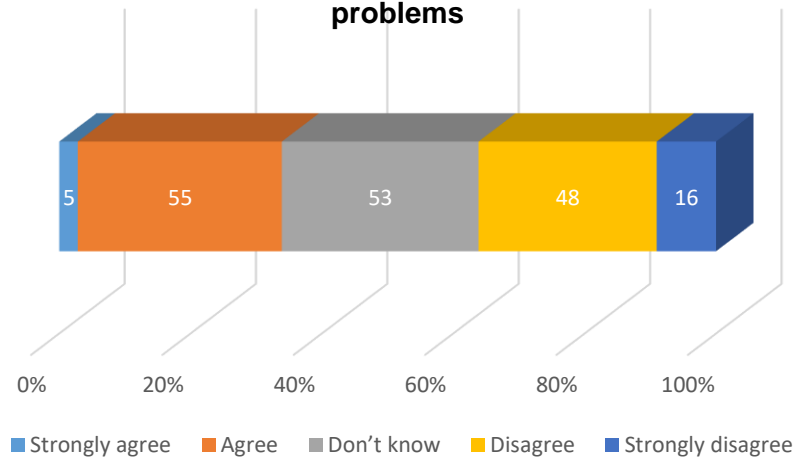
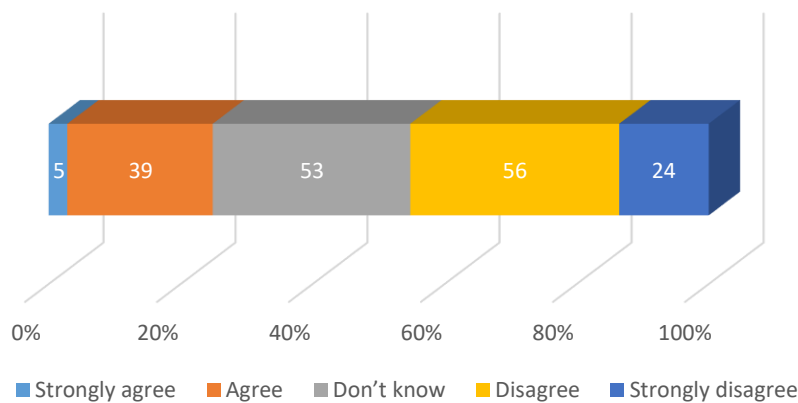


Figure 7. I feel confident that others in my country and around the world will contribute towards solving global problems



4.2.8 Desire for Connection

The figures 8 to 10 below provide insights into the desire for connection among the sample participants across three dimensions: personal/family heritage, national/cultural heritage, and general social connection.

Desire for Connection to Personal/Family Heritage (Figure 8): Regarding connection to personal and family heritage, nearly half (49.2%) agreed, and 12% strongly agreed, highlighting a **widespread interest in familial and ancestral ties**. However, 13.1% disagreed, and 3.3% strongly disagreed, indicating a smaller but notable group that does not prioritize this connection. The "Don't know" response rate (19.1%) suggests some participants may not have given significant thought to their family history or may feel disconnected due to various factors, such as geographic separation or generational gaps.

Desire for Connection to National/Cultural Heritage (Figure 9): The results for national and cultural heritage connection follow a similar trend. About 48.6% agreed, and 13.7% strongly agreed,

suggesting a **strong inclination toward cultural identity**. However, there was a slightly higher disagreement rate (14.8%) compared to personal heritage, and 2.2% strongly disagreed. The "Don't know" response rate (17.5%) indicates that a notable proportion of participants may feel uncertain about their relationship with their cultural background.

Desire for Social Connection (Figure 10): A significant portion of respondents (51.4%) agreed that they desire to feel more connected with others, with an additional 10.9% strongly agreeing. This suggests that **over 60% of the sample population actively seeks deeper interpersonal connections**. Conversely, 12% of respondents disagreed, and 2.2% strongly disagreed, indicating a small subset that does not share this desire. Interestingly, 20.2% selected "Don't know," implying uncertainty or ambivalence about their social connectivity needs.

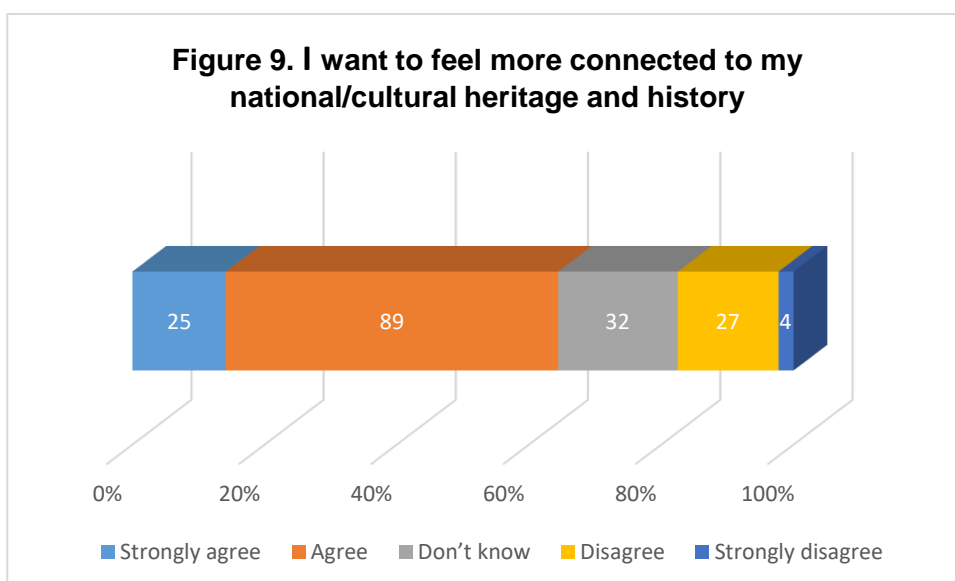
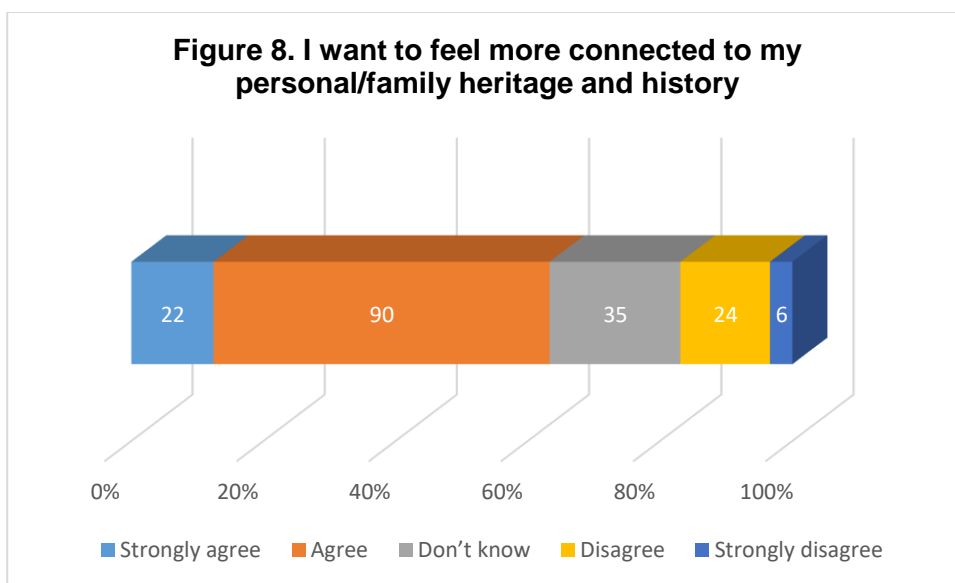
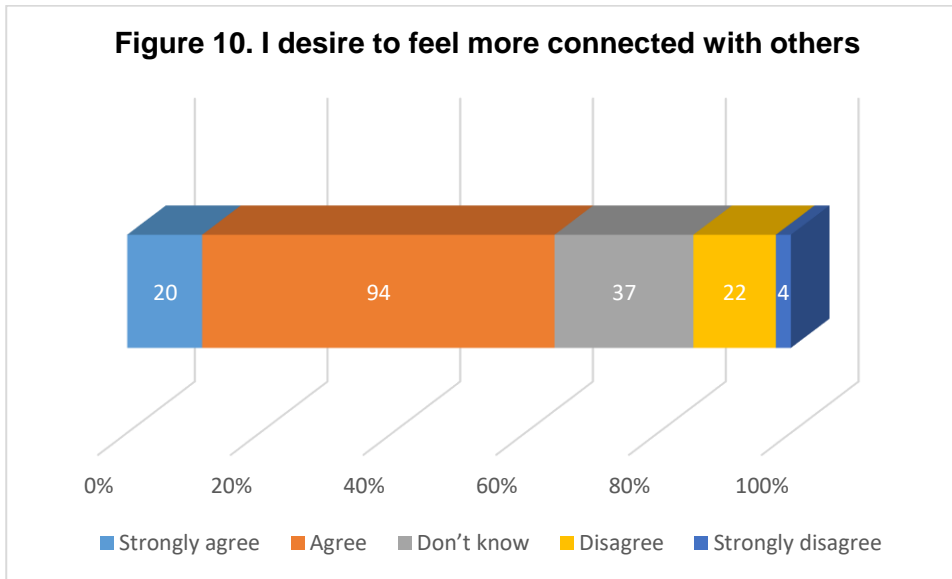


Figure 10. I desire to feel more connected with others



4.2.9 Critical Thinking and Personal Interpretation

The data presented in the figures 11 to 15 below offer useful insights into the critical thinking and personal interpretation of cultural heritage among the study participants.

Questioning Information in Museums and Art Galleries (Figure 11): A notable proportion of respondents (39.9%) disagreed with the statement that they do not question what they learn in museums and galleries due to a lack of expertise. Furthermore, 18.6% strongly disagreed, indicating that a majority of individuals engage critically with the information presented. However, 19.1% agreed and 3.3% strongly agreed, suggesting that a segment of the population still places unquestioning trust in these institutions. This division highlights a variance in critical engagement, with a **tendency toward skepticism or independent evaluation.**

Personal Interpretation of Exhibits (Figure 12): A strong majority of respondents (61.7% agreeing, 18.6% strongly agreeing) indicated that they make their own interpretations of museum and gallery exhibits. Only a small fraction (10.4%) disagreed, showing that most individuals actively engage with and analyze cultural heritage through their own perspectives. This high level of personal interpretation suggests that visitors do not merely absorb information passively but rather construct meaning based on their own experiences and understanding.

Perceptions of Objectivity in Museums and Galleries (Figure 13): The belief that museums and galleries present information objectively is met with skepticism. While 20.8% agreed with the statement, a larger portion (33.9%) disagreed, and 9.3% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 27.3% responded with "don't know," indicating uncertainty about the neutrality of these institutions. These findings suggest that **many visitors recognize the subjectivity inherent in curation, acknowledging that museum narratives can be influenced by cultural, historical, and political contexts.**

Representation of Diversity in Museums (Figure 14): Perceptions of how well museums represent the diversity of lived experiences and communities are mixed. **A significant portion (44.8%) agreed that these institutions are representative, with an additional 5.5% strongly agreeing.** However, 15.8% disagreed and 4.4% strongly disagreed, suggesting concerns about inclusivity. Notably, 26.2% expressed uncertainty, which may reflect a lack of awareness regarding museum efforts in representation or a perceived gap between institutional claims and actual diversity.

Preference for Collaborative vs. Top-Down Approaches (Figure 15): The preference for participatory or community-led exhibitions over traditional top-down approaches is evident. A total of 37.7% agreed and 8.2% strongly agreed with this preference, showing a **demand for more interactive and inclusive exhibition models**. However, 24.6% disagreed and 3.3% strongly disagreed, suggesting that some visitors still value expert-driven curation. A notable 23.0% responded with "don't know," indicating that many may not be familiar with alternative curatorial approaches.

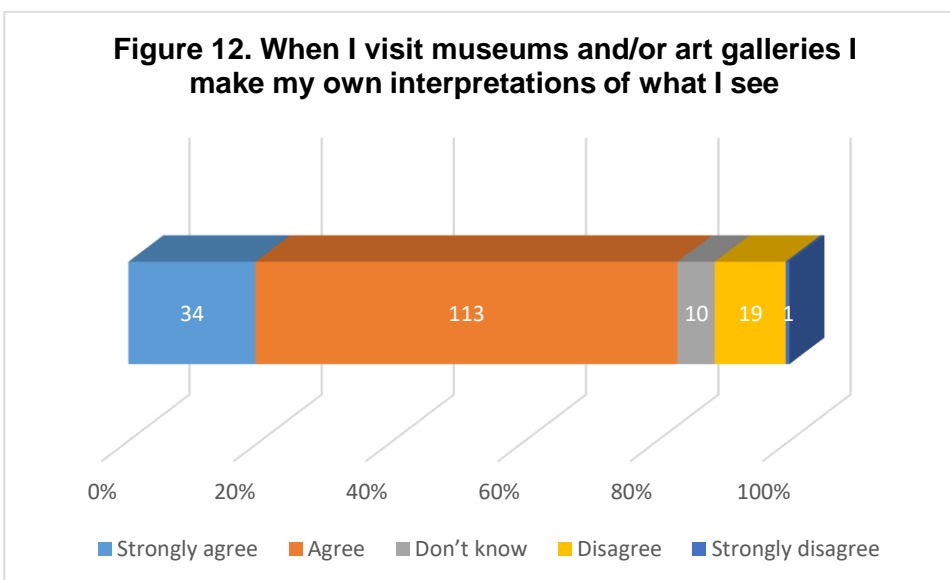
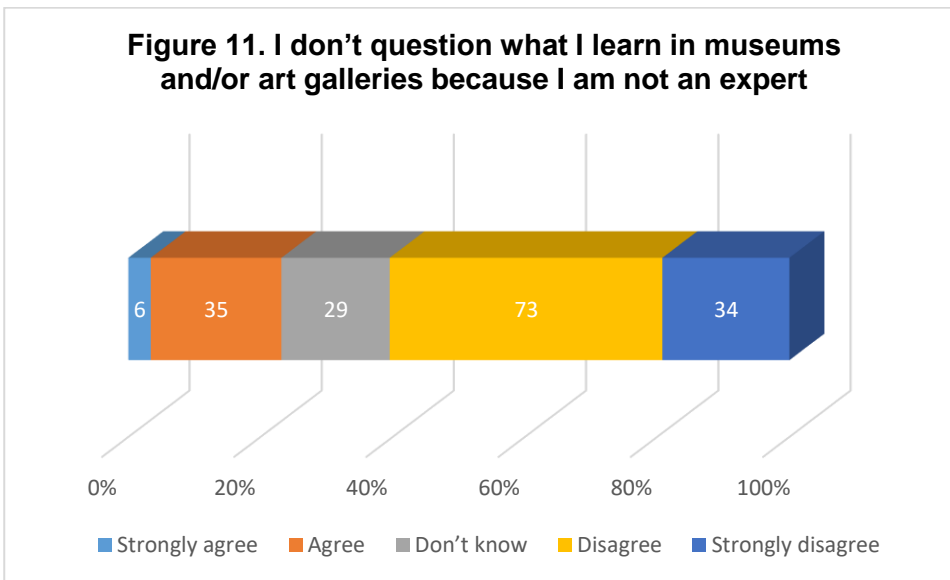


Figure 13. Museums and/or art galleries present the truth objectively

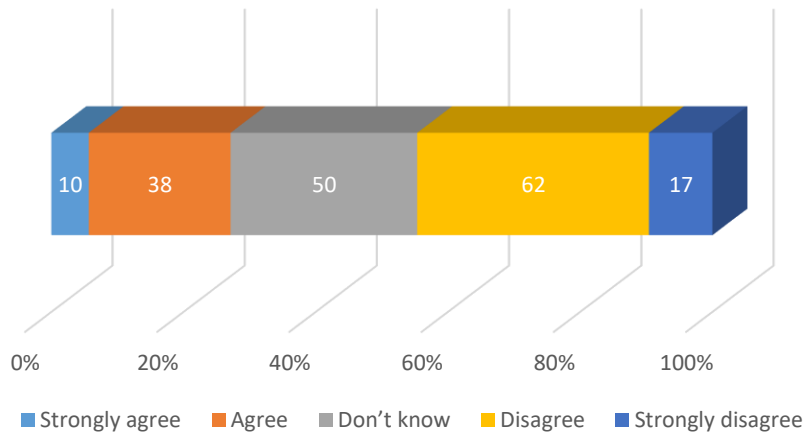


Figure 14. Museums and/or art galleries are mostly representative of the diversity of lived experiences and communities in my country

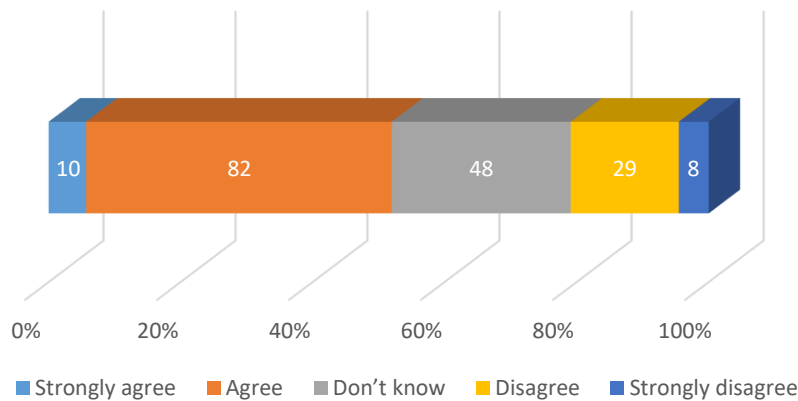
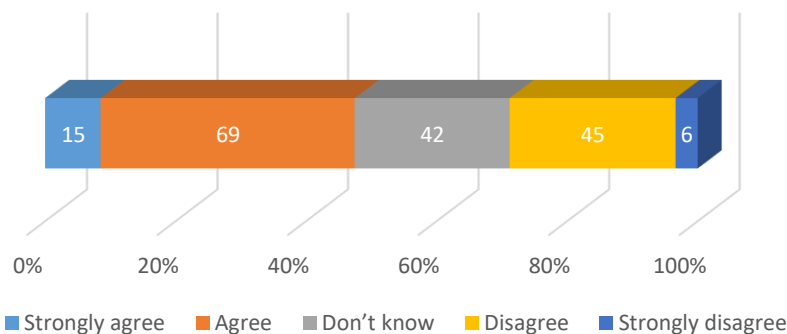


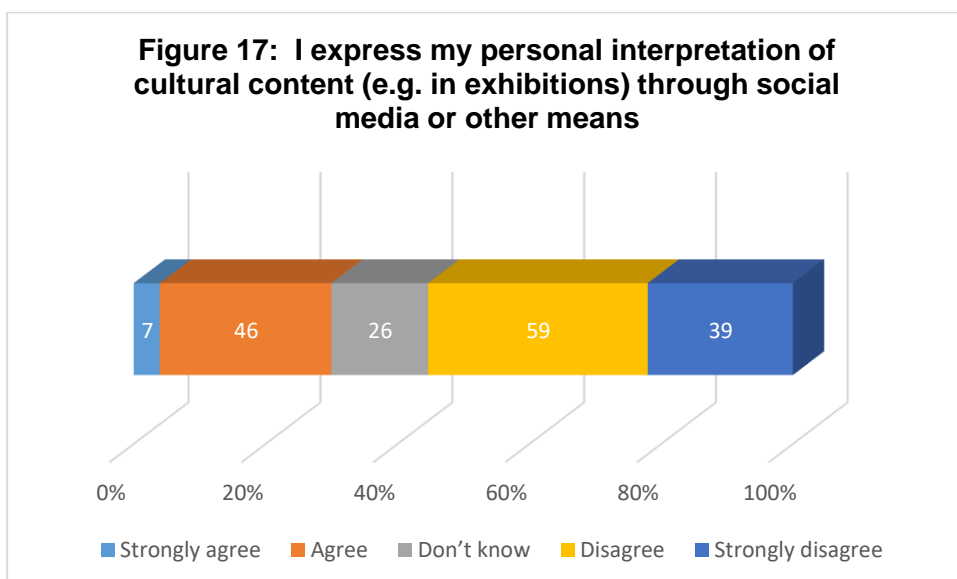
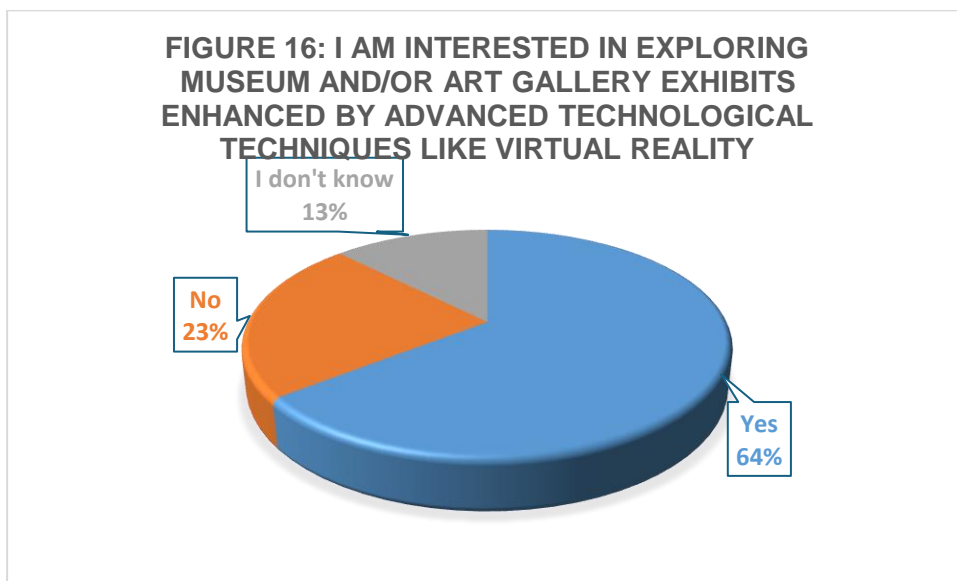
Figure 15. I prefer museums and/or art galleries that have a collaborative approach (e.g. participatory or community-led exhibitions) rather than a top-down approach (e.g. viewing exhibits and information as presented by the experts)



4.2.10 Use of Technology and Social Media

The study population demonstrates a **significant interest in the integration of advanced technological techniques**, such as virtual reality (VR), in museum and art gallery exhibits. An overwhelming 62.3% of respondents reported interested in being familiar with or engaged in such technological enhancements.

On the other hand, when participants were asked whether they express personal interpretations of cultural content (such as exhibitions) on social media or other platforms, responses were divided: 25.1% agreed with the statement, but a larger proportion, 32.2% disagreed and 21.3% strongly disagreed, totaling 53.5%, **suggesting that more than half of respondents do not use social media or other digital means to engage critically with cultural experiences.**



4.2.11 Associations Between Factors Related to TMt

To further investigate potential associations between factors more strongly related to the TMt, several bivariate and multivariable analyses were conducted. The statistically significant results are summarized as follows:

- **Participants residing in Northern European countries were significantly more likely to expect to “learn about their personal/family heritage and history”** in a museum and/or art gallery compared to those in Southern European countries (34.2% vs. 20.4%, chi-square test, $p < 0.03$).
- **Participants residing in Northern European countries were significantly more likely to expect to “spend time with friends/family/other people”** in a museum and/or art gallery compared to those in Southern European countries (58.9% vs. 34%, chi-square test, $p < 0.0001$).
- **Participants residing in Southern European countries were significantly more likely to feel “extremely anxious about economic difficulties”** compared to those in Northern European countries (16.5% vs. 5.5%, chi-square test, $p < 0.048$).
- After running various regression models analysing the most common “contemporary fears” of participants, global war and climate change (see section 4.2.6), **gender was identified as a statistically significant predictor of high fear of global war, with females being more anxious than males⁵.**

4.2.12 Additional Insights from the Open-Ended Questions

Transformative experiences with cultural heritage: Most respondents (84.7%) recalled a cultural heritage experience that they found moving or altered their perspective. **Art exhibitions were frequently described as moving and impressive, evoking feelings of freedom, connection, spirituality, belonging and a greater awareness of the world.** Meaningful experiences in historical museums were more often framed in cognitive terms, with respondents highlighting their interest, learning, increased understanding and shifts perspective. Particularly, several respondents recounted visiting museums dedicated to historical events involving human tragedy (e.g., the Holocaust), describing these experiences as intensely emotional. These experiences prompted deep reflection on human tragedy and reckoning with human nature, with respondents expressing feelings of empathy, sorrow, absence and loss.

Critical thinking and shifting perspectives: Exhibitions that changed visitors’ understanding of certain subjects and prompted critical thinking were particularly memorable. For example, gaining insight for the first time into why certain atrocities were committed from the perspective of the perpetrator. **Some respondents reflected critically on the exhibitions themselves**, considering the validity of the historical narrative, or interrogating the displays of stolen heritage collections in European museums. Others described **intercultural exhibitions as particularly moving**, as moments of connection with political movements (e.g., women’s rights) and opportunities to understand the experiences of others (e.g., refugees, racism). Respondents expressed how these experiences shifted their perspectives and prejudices and led them to reflect on their own culture through comparison.

Reflection on contemporary issues: Exhibitions in which visitors associated artworks with contemporary challenges they were concerned about (e.g., climate change, the loss of culture and tradition) were moving and changed respondents’ perspectives. In some cases, the viewer made the association independently through the themes of the works. In others, respondents highlighted

⁵ Linear regression: $b = -0.609$, $t = -2.075$, $p < 0.04$

exhibitions that juxtaposed historical artefacts with contemporary works and themes, which they found more meaningful in direct comparison to the present day. For example, an exhibition that placed classical artworks beside contemporary artworks created by refugees, or even the ancient Greek ruins visible in Athenian metro stations, prompted viewers to **reflect on the history and similarities to the present.**

Building personal connection: Exhibitions that revealed **new insights into the contemporary world (e.g., the impact of design on daily life) or a new aspect of a familiar subject (e.g., the use of colour in 19th-century art) were particularly memorable to respondents**, as they made connections to their personal experience and knowledge. Other respondents recalled connecting to their heritage in local and national history museums, and described drawing comparisons between life now and then, discovering something unexpected, vividly remembering past events or feeling pride in their heritage. One respondent, for example, described learning about the history of village and town names and subsequently re-evaluating the cultural landscape and history of their region through this new lens.

Spatial and experiential design: **Architecture, physical space and immersive environments (e.g., entering a historical ship, an artist's home, or heritage sites) were significant for respondents in evoking imagination, emotion and empathy.** For example, some recalled the architecture of the Jewish Museum of Berlin evoking emotion, and 'stepping on' the installation Shalekhet found there. Others were touched by the architecture and grandeur of cultural institutions, palaces and historical churches.

Accessibility: Time constraints due to busy daytime schedules were a recurrent concern for respondents, as was the high cost of admission. When asked about factors that would encourage more frequent visits, **about 26% of respondents highlighted reduced admission fees or extended opening hours.**

Use of technology: When asked about factors that would improve their experiences in museums, several respondents suggested the use of newer technologies. Proposed interventions included the development of apps and interactive digital guides, and even an AI-driven personalised guide tailored to age, language, and interests. Emerging technologies such as AI, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and 3D reconstructions were also recommended to create more engaging and accessible exhibits.

Immersive, interactive and participatory exhibitions: When asked about factors that would improve their museum experience, respondents suggested more participatory activities, including **workshops, hands-on learning opportunities, dialogues with experts and artists, and live demonstrations.** Additionally, several participants recommended multisensory, immersive and interactive exhibitions. Many visitors found these experiences particularly memorable and engaging, as they were able to imagine living in a certain era, or put themselves in someone else's shoes. For example, a visit to an artist's home and learning about the artist's life story helped visitors connect to their artworks.

Child-friendly exhibitions: Accommodations for children and families were highlighted by several respondents when asked about factors that would improve their experience in museums or enable more frequent visits. Recommendations included practical accessibility (e.g., family rooms, breastfeeding rooms, childcare) as well as more child-oriented exhibitions. Children's workshops and activities, multisensory elements, explanatory information tailored for children, and digital tools such as apps and interactive games were suggested.

5 Main Conclusions

Based on the findings from the individual interviews with the experts, and the online questionnaire for the general public, the main conclusions are as follows:

1. **The motivations behind visiting cultural heritage exhibits are multifaceted, spanning education, leisure, social interaction, tourism, emotional engagement, and personal curiosity.** While museums serve as sites for learning and reflection, they must also evolve to meet the needs of diverse audiences. The challenge lies in **balancing financial sustainability with meaningful, inclusive, and enriching visitor experiences.** Understanding the varied motivations behind museum visits will help institutions tailor their offerings and ensure cultural heritage remains accessible, engaging, and transformative for all.
2. **The transformative potential of cultural heritage is evident across multiple dimensions, including identity formation, emotional engagement, intellectual curiosity, and social change.** While some experts are cautious about overstating its impact, there is broad agreement that **CH provides opportunities for reflection, learning, and connection.** However, museums must carefully consider how they present their narratives, ensuring that they are inclusive and ethically responsible to maximize their transformative potential.
3. There are several **barriers to accessing cultural heritage, spanning geographical, financial, psychological, informational, and accessibility-related challenges.** Addressing these barriers requires improved accessibility measures, targeted outreach efforts, simplified communication, and enhanced engagement strategies. By taking steps to make **cultural heritage institutions more inclusive and welcoming,** museums can expand their audiences and fulfil their educational and social missions more effectively.
4. **Engagement with cultural heritage is shaped by storytelling, personal connections, emotional responses, and interactive elements.** Immersion and authenticity further enhance the visitor experience, while prior knowledge and personal inclinations influence engagement depth. **Museums should design exhibits inclusively, integrating digital and theatrical elements, and continuously assess visitor feedback to refine their approaches. Facilitating emotional engagement with cultural heritage involves a combination of personal storytelling, symbolic representation, immersive experiences, and ethical curation.** By creating a comfortable environment, encouraging visitor participation, and carefully balancing emotional intensity, museums can foster deep, meaningful connections between visitors and cultural heritage.
5. Looking ahead, **museums must strike a balance between traditional and digital storytelling methods. While interactive digital tools can attract younger audiences and those unfamiliar with cultural heritage, many visitors still seek authenticity and direct engagement with historical objects.** Experts suggest a mix of digital and physical experiences, where technology is used strategically in pre-visit, during-visit, and post-visit phases.
6. In synthesizing expert insights, it is evident that **reflection and anxiety reduction are interconnected yet distinct aspects of museum and art experiences.** While safe environments, social engagement, and emotionally resonant storytelling contribute to fostering reflection, the impact on anxiety reduction varies. **Some visitors find comfort in imagination and human-centred experiences, while others may experience heightened emotional responses.** This nuanced understanding highlights the importance of thoughtful curation and visitor preparation to optimize museum experiences for emotional well-being.

7. **Museums play a decisive role in shaping societal narratives, providing spaces for dialogue, and fostering community and empathy.** While exhibits can be both uniting and divisive, their impact depends on their content, presentation, and visitor engagement. **By emphasizing small human stories, allowing for interpretation, and facilitating community involvement, museums can create environments where visitors feel connected, even when engaging with difficult histories.**
8. Experts agree that personal interpretation is a fundamental aspect of experiencing cultural heritage. Museums can encourage emotional engagement, critical thinking, and personal connections by presenting diverse narratives, leveraging social media, and allowing room for individual experiences. **By balancing objectivity and interpretation, museums can serve as platforms for reflection, dialogue, and deeper cultural understanding.**
9. **Museums as essential travel experiences.** The high percentage of respondents visiting museums while traveling (both domestically and internationally) underscores the role of museums as cultural tourism landmarks.
10. Education and intellectual engagement are primary drivers. The questionnaire data indicate that **visitors are primarily motivated by learning**, about their own heritage, other cultures, or specific intellectual topics.
11. Emotional and social engagement is secondary but still relevant, **while education dominates, many also seek emotionally resonant experiences and social interaction, reinforcing the idea that museums must offer both informative and immersive content.**
12. The questionnaire's findings emphasize **the growing significance of digital cultural experiences**, suggesting that museums, cultural institutions, and content creators should continue developing engaging, accessible, and interactive online offerings to sustain and expand their audience. **Cultural experiences are highly valued, with a majority of respondents giving them high importance.** There is a general consensus that culture plays a meaningful role in personal and intellectual life, reinforcing the idea that cultural institutions and activities are integral to people's experiences.
13. Most visitors do not share negative perceptions of museums, indicating **that museums are largely seen as welcoming, engaging, and useful.**
14. For the minority with concerns, **improving accessibility, interactivity, and cultural representation could enhance engagement.** Museums can incorporate more immersive experiences, fostering inclusivity, and emphasizing personal and social relevance in their exhibits.
15. Questionnaire findings highlight **that visitors primarily view museums as places of learning and cultural enrichment.** They seek intellectual stimulation, historical awareness, and meaningful emotional connections over hands-on engagement. While interactive elements can enhance the experience for some, museums should prioritize well-researched exhibitions and immersive storytelling to fulfil visitors' primary expectations.
16. The findings indicate that contemporary **museum visitors are most anxious about large-scale societal and environmental concerns, particularly global uncertainty and climate change.** These issues may evoke a sense of helplessness or urgency, given their wide-reaching consequences. **Personal and financial security are also significant stressors**, highlighting the impact of economic instability on individuals' well-being. **Higher economic anxiety in Southern Europe may influence how people perceive museum visits**, potentially impacting attendance and engagement levels. Further, **women tend to experience higher anxiety about global war** compared to men, which may affect their interest in museum exhibitions related to conflict, history, or geopolitics. Given these insights, museums can consider incorporating exhibitions, educational programs, or community discussions that address these anxieties, such as sustainability efforts, economic resilience, and mental health awareness. **By acknowledging these**

contemporary fears, museums can serve as platforms for dialogue, reassurance, and solutions for visitors navigating an uncertain world.

17. **The results suggest that participants generally have high self-confidence, particularly in their ability to cope with change and make a difference.** However, their confidence in others, especially at the global level, is much weaker, with high levels of skepticism and uncertainty. This indicates **a potential gap between personal empowerment and trust in collective action**, which could impact engagement in community or global initiatives.
18. **The majority of participants expressed a desire for deeper social relationships, suggesting an underlying need for community and interpersonal engagement.** This could indicate potential avenues for social support initiatives, community-building activities, and digital or physical spaces that foster connectivity. **In addition, socializing (spending time with friends/family) is a stronger motivator for museum visits among Northern Europeans** compared to Southern Europeans (see section 4.2.11).
19. **Both personal and cultural heritage connection were important to many respondents, with slightly higher interest in personal/family history than national/cultural identity.** This may reflect an increasing focus on individual ancestry and personal history over broader national narratives.
20. **While the majority of participants seek connection in various ways, a small yet significant group does not share this inclination.** Understanding the reasons behind these differences, whether due to personal contentment, past experiences, or other factors, could offer deeper insights into how connection is perceived within different demographic segments. **Future research or interventions might explore the barriers that prevent deeper connection and develop strategies to support individuals in fostering meaningful relationships and a stronger sense of identity.**
21. The questionnaire findings **reveal a generally engaged and critically aware audience that values personal interpretation of cultural heritage.** While many visitors question museum narratives and seek to construct their own meanings, a portion still accepts presented information without scrutiny. **There is a recognition of the subjectivity in museum curation, with some concerns about representation and diversity.** Additionally, there is a growing preference for participatory approaches, reflecting **a shift towards more inclusive and community-driven museum experiences.**
22. The findings revealed an interesting contrast: **while a majority of respondents engage with advanced technological tools such as VR in museums and galleries, far fewer actively share their cultural interpretations via social media.** This could suggest that **technology is primarily used for enhancing the passive experience of exhibits rather than encouraging interactive or discursive engagement.** These insights suggest an opportunity for museums and galleries to further leverage digital and social media strategies to encourage greater public participation and discussion. **By fostering interactive platforms and promoting digital storytelling, institutions can bridge the gap between technological engagement and active cultural discourse, enriching the overall visitor experience.**

6 Key Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this ES, and in alignment with the objectives of META-MUSEUM, the following key practical recommendations are suggested:

- **Develop Inclusive and Immersive Storytelling:** Use a mix of digital and physical storytelling techniques, such as VR, AR, theatrical elements, and personal narratives, to create deeper emotional engagement while ensuring accessibility and inclusivity.
- **Enhance Accessibility and Outreach:** Address financial, geographical, and psychological barriers through subsidized entry programs, mobile exhibitions, multilingual resources, and targeted outreach to underserved communities.
- **Balance Traditional and Digital Engagement:** While offering digital experiences, ensure that they complement rather than replace authentic physical interactions with cultural heritage objects, catering to both tech-savvy and traditional visitors.
- **Facilitate Community Involvement:** Encourage visitor participation in co-curation, community-driven exhibitions, and storytelling initiatives, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement with CH.
- **Create Spaces for Dialogue and Reflection:** Offer forums, discussion groups, and interactive installations that address contemporary societal concerns (e.g., climate change, economic resilience) and provide platforms for public discourse.
- **Leverage Social Media and Digital Participation:** Encourage visitors to share their interpretations and experiences on social media through campaigns, challenges, and interactive online discussions, increasing public discourse on cultural heritage.
- **Prioritize Ethical Curation and Representation:** Ensure diverse perspectives and narratives are included, especially those of historically marginalized communities, to foster a more inclusive understanding of CH.
- **Support Emotional Well-Being:** Design exhibits that balance emotional intensity with opportunities for contemplation, offering calming spaces, interactive elements, and guided experiences to optimize visitor comfort.
- **Integrate Personal and Ancestral Histories:** Provide opportunities for visitors to explore their own family and cultural heritage through genealogy resources, interactive workshops, and community storytelling projects.
- **Expand Museum Learning Beyond the Visit:** Offer digital pre-visit materials, post-visit engagement opportunities, and lifelong learning programs to extend the transformative impact of museum experiences.
- **Tailor Museum Offerings to Regional Preferences:**
 - Museums in Northern Europe should emphasize exhibitions and programs related to personal and family heritage, while Southern European museums may benefit from enhancing social aspects, such as interactive group activities, guided tours, and family-friendly experiences, to attract more visitors.
 - In Southern Europe, museums could introduce more affordable entry options, free-access days, or community partnership programs to encourage visits despite financial concerns.
- **Curate Exhibitions with Sensitivity to Contemporary Fears:** Given that global war and climate change are prevalent concerns, museums could develop exhibits that educate and provide hopeful narratives or solutions. Gender-sensitive programming, such as exhibitions on peacebuilding or climate resilience, may resonate more with female audiences experiencing heightened anxiety.

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Annex 1: Consent Form for the Interviews

General Information

You are invited to participate in an individual interview about the role that empathy can play in understanding the constantly changing nature of cultural heritage (CH), the role that empathic emotions, co-creation and individual interpretation play in sharing this understanding, and in helping citizens to face current and future societal transformations, with greater confidence.

This research is being carried out by Senior Researcher Dr. Vasileios Margaritis and Project Manager Ms. Daphne Koufopanou who work at the KMOP and are referred to in this form as "researchers".

META-MUSEUM is an EU-funded project which proposes an empathic approach to CH, in order to understand the CH transformative nature, fostering inclusion, participation, social cohesion, and improving the quality of life.

Procedures

You are invited to participate in an individual interview which will last 45 to 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and without compensation. If you decide to participate in the interview now, you can change your mind later. You can withdraw from the interview at any time. There are no direct benefits to you from this research. When the data analysis is complete, the "researchers" will share the main results with you in the form of a summary of the main points.

You can also select if you agree or not to record the interview:

Yes

No

Data Privacy

The researcher(s) are obliged to protect the confidentiality of your data. Your identity will be known to the researcher(s) within the limits of the relevant personal data protection law. Researcher(s) are only permitted to disclose your identity or contact details as required with KMOP staff (who are also required to protect the confidentiality of your data).

Researcher(s) will not use your personal information and data for any purposes other than those of the research. Also, the researcher(s) will not include your name or any other data that could identify you in the final project reports. If the researcher(s) shared the project data with another researcher in the future, the dataset would not contain identifying information, so this would not require your written consent. The data will be kept secure through paper and electronic records in respective controlled-access storage facilities. Data will be retained for a period of at least 5 years after the end of the project, as required by the KMOP Research Ethics Committee.

You can contact the 'researchers' at the following email addresses:

margaritis.v@kmop.org και koufopanou.d@kmop.org

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher(s) for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent:



Participant's Name :

Date :

Participant's Signature :

Researcher's Signature:

Annex 2: Experts Interview Protocol



Task 2.1 lead by KMOP ; participant: OPI-PIB

Preliminary Study: Experts Interview Guide

Online 45-60 minutes

Consent Form Required

3 target groups:

- Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals (curators, museum directors)
- Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics (e.g., museologists / museographers)
- Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, Neuroscientists

S ubject	Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals	Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics	Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists
Introductory questions			
O pening	How do you think, why do people visit cultural heritage sites and exhibitions? Tell me about specific examples, if possible.	How do you think, why do people visit cultural heritage sites and exhibitions? Tell me about specific examples, if possible.	How do you think, why do people visit cultural heritage sites and exhibitions? Tell me about specific examples, if possible.
	Basing on your experiences, what practical factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?	Basing on your experiences, what practical factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?	Basing on your experiences, what practical factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?
C ultural heritag e accessi bility	Can you tell me about any initiatives you know of that have successfully increased access to cultural heritage?	Can you tell me about any initiatives you know of that have successfully increased access to cultural heritage?	What are the main barriers to people accessing cultural heritage? Consider both practical and motivational or emotional factors.

Subject	Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals	Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics	Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists
<p>Perception of the transformative nature of cultural heritage</p>	<p>Do you think cultural heritage exhibits tend to have lasting psychological impact on visitors? How can you tell?</p> <p>What are the potential emotional and societal benefits of exposure to cultural heritage?</p>	<p>What are the potential emotional and societal benefits of exposure to cultural heritage?</p>	<p>In what ways do encounters with cultural heritage have a (lasting) psychological impact on an individual?</p> <p>How would you define and measure this impact?</p> <p>How is this impact likely to vary depending on the individual's identity and personal experiences?</p> <p>How would you define a <i>transformative experience</i> in the context of encounters with cultural heritage?</p>
<p>Barriers</p>	<p>What are the main barriers to people accessing cultural heritage? Consider both practical and motivational or emotional factors.</p>	<p>What are the main barriers to people accessing cultural heritage? Consider both practical and motivational or emotional factors.</p>	
<p>Factors impacting engagement with cultural heritage (once at the exhibit)</p>	<p>What emotional or motivational factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?</p> <p>How can we assess quality or depth of engagement with cultural heritage?</p>	<p>What emotional or motivational factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?</p> <p>How can we assess quality or depth of engagement with cultural heritage?</p>	<p>What emotional or motivational factors affect how visitors are able to engage with cultural heritage?</p> <p>How can we assess quality or depth of engagement with cultural heritage?</p>
<p>Facilitating emotional engagement with cultural heritage</p>	<p>How are the potential emotional reactions of the audience considered when designing cultural heritage exhibitions?</p> <p>Can you tell me about a cultural heritage exhibition where you observed high levels of emotional engagement from viewers?</p> <p>How did this manifest, and did you view this as a positive or a negative?</p> <p>What about the exhibit facilitated emotional connection?</p> <p>How should the emotional reactions of the audience be taken into account when designing cultural heritage exhibitions?</p>	<p>How are the potential emotional reactions of the audience considered when designing cultural heritage exhibitions?</p> <p>Can you tell me about a cultural heritage exhibition where you observed high levels of emotional engagement from viewers?</p> <p>How did this manifest, and did you view this as a positive or a negative?</p> <p>What about the exhibit facilitated emotional connection?</p> <p>How should the emotional reactions of the audience be taken into account when designing cultural heritage exhibitions?</p>	<p>How would you define and measure emotional engagement in the context of a cultural heritage exhibition?</p> <p>How can cultural heritage exhibitions be designed to encourage emotional engagement?</p>

Subject	Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals	Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics	Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists
Questions on approaches to facilitating emotional engagement			
<p>Thematic links to contemporary context and individual experience</p>	<p>Tell me about an example where the thematic choice of the exhibition affected the level of the audience's emotional engagement (positively or negatively).</p> <p>Did the exhibit evoke different responses from different audience groups, depending on identity or heritage?</p> <p>How can links or references to the contemporary context be made within exhibitions in order to attract new audiences?</p> <p>Tell me about times you have observed audience members discussing contemporary challenges (social, economic, ecological) prompted by cultural heritage.</p> <p>What was it about the exhibit that encouraged those discussions?</p> <p>How could this be encouraged further in curation and museum design?</p>	<p>How can thematic links to contemporary context or to the experiences of particular audience groups be made to increase engagement?</p> <p>How can links or references to the contemporary context be made within exhibitions in order to attract new audiences?</p>	<p>How might encounters with cultural heritage that resonates with our personal experiences or heritage have a psychological impact? How does this relate to self-confidence and resilience?</p> <p>How might the emotional response or psychological impact of an exhibit vary depending on the individual's identity and life experiences?</p> <p>How can cultural heritage with thematic links to contemporary challenges encourage active participation in addressing social issues?</p> <p>In what ways can discussions with others about contemporary challenges affect people's resilience and confidence in the face of those challenges?</p>
<p>Information delivery and use of narrative</p>	<p>Which ways of communicating explanatory information (format and style of exhibition text, videos, audio guides etc) have you observed as being most engaging to viewers? How can you tell?</p> <p>Can you tell me about an example of the use of narrative in a cultural heritage context, and how this impacted audience engagement?</p>	<p>Which ways of communicating explanatory information (format and style of exhibition text, videos, audio guides etc) tend to be most effective in engaging viewers? How is this measured?</p> <p>Can you tell me about an example of the use of narrative in a cultural heritage context, and how this impacted audience engagement?</p>	<p>Which ways of communicating explanatory information (format and style of exhibition text, videos, audio guides etc) are most likely to be engaging and memorable to audience members?</p> <p>How can the use of narrative when communicating explanatory information facilitate engagement?</p> <p>How does the use of multi-media tools impact engagement with the material?</p>
<p>Facilitating reflection and reducing anxiety</p>	<p>How can moments of reflection be incorporated within museum design and curation?</p> <p>Tell me about an exhibition in which this was successful.</p> <p>How does the atmosphere of the space shape our experience of cultural heritage exhibits?</p>	<p>How can moments of reflection be incorporated within museum design and curation?</p> <p>Tell me about an exhibition in which this was successful.</p> <p>How does the atmosphere of the space shape our experience of cultural heritage exhibits?</p>	<p>In what ways can the atmosphere and the environment of a cultural heritage site be designed to reduce stress and or anxiety?</p> <p>How can audience members be encouraged to have moments of pause and reflection?</p> <p>In what ways can exposure to cultural heritage contribute to personal wellbeing?</p>

Subject	Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals	Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics	Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists
Empathy and community	<p>Can you tell me about times you have observed empathetic responses to cultural heritage, or increased motivation to participate more actively in the community?</p> <p>How can cultural heritage spaces be designed to function as community spaces? How can we promote dialogue between different social groups within cultural heritage spaces?</p> <p>To what extent are cultural heritage exhibits uniting or divisive, along community boundaries? What curatorial approaches or methodologies can be used to create inclusive narratives?</p>	<p>How can we incorporate empathy and empathetic relations within museum design and curation?</p> <p>How can cultural heritage spaces become community spaces? How can we promote dialogue between different social groups within cultural heritage spaces?</p> <p>To what extent are cultural heritage exhibits uniting or divisive, along community boundaries? What curatorial approaches or methodologies can be used to create inclusive narratives?</p>	<p>Can exposure to diverse experiences contribute to the development of empathy? How?</p> <p>How can we promote dialogue between different social groups within cultural heritage spaces?</p> <p>What are the psychological benefits of cultural exchange?</p> <p>To what extent are cultural heritage exhibits uniting or divisive, along community boundaries?</p>
Co-creation and participation	<p>Can you tell me about an exhibit that successfully used co-creative or participatory elements to engage either the local community or visitors?</p> <p>In what ways do these methods change the types of audience that attend and/or the way the audience engages with the material?</p>	<p>Can you tell me about an exhibit that successfully used co-creative or participatory elements to engage either the local community or visitors?</p> <p>In what ways do these methods change the types of audience that attend and/or the way the audience engages with the material?</p>	<p>How might incorporating participatory or co-creative elements impact emotional engagement with a cultural heritage exhibit?</p> <p>How might these activities lead to changes in behaviour outside the exhibition?</p> <p>What factors should be considered in order to make such activities meaningful to diverse audiences?</p> <p>What kind of environment is likely to encourage meaningful participation?</p>
Final question: exploring project themes			
Interpretation and personal appropriation of cultural heritage	<p>How can learning about or viewing cultural and historical objects contribute to a stronger sense of identity and belonging?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage facilitate understanding of our personal experiences and our experience of the world around us? How?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage increase confidence in the face of contemporary challenges? How?</p> <p><i>If these topic do not appear spontaneously, ask:</i></p> <p>What curatorial practices might empower audience members to think critically, to interpret the exhibits themselves?</p> <p>Can you think of any examples of heritage exhibits which encouraged personal</p>	<p>How can learning about or viewing cultural and historical objects contribute to a stronger sense of identity and belonging?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage facilitate understanding of our personal experiences and our experience of the world around us? How?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage increase confidence in the face of contemporary challenges? How?</p> <p><i>If these topic do not appear spontaneously, ask:</i></p> <p>What curatorial practices might empower audience members to think critically, to interpret the exhibits themselves?</p>	<p>How can learning about or viewing cultural and historical objects contribute to a stronger sense of identity and belonging?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage facilitate understanding of our personal experiences and our experience of the world around us? How?</p> <p>Can exposure to cultural heritage increase confidence in the face of contemporary challenges? How?</p>

Subject	Group 1: Museum and Gallery Professionals	Group 2: Cultural Heritage Specialists / Academics	Group 3: Psychologists, Sociologists, and Neuroscientists
	<p>identification with the content? How was that achieved?</p>	<p>Can you think of any examples of heritage exhibits which encouraged personal identification with the content? How was that achieved?</p>	

Annex 3: Online Questionnaire for the Public

3/4/25, 12:14 PM Surveys - META-MUSEUM: Exploring Audience Perceptions of Cultural Heritage

META-MUSEUM: Exploring Audience Perceptions of Cultural Heritage

General Information

You are invited to participate in an online questionnaire about the role that empathy can play in understanding the constantly changing nature of cultural heritage (CH), the role that empathic emotions, co-creation and individual interpretation play in sharing this understanding, and in helping citizens to face current and future societal transformations, with greater confidence.

This research is being carried out by Senior Researcher Dr. Vasileios Margaritis and Senior Project Manager Ms. Afroditi Azari who work at the KMOP and are referred to in this form as "researchers".

META-MUSEUM is an EU-funded project which proposes an empathic approach to CH, in order to understand the CH transformative nature, fostering inclusion, participation, social cohesion, and improving the quality of life.

Procedures

You are invited to participate in an online questionnaire that should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and without compensation. If you decide to participate in the questionnaire now, you can change your mind later. You can withdraw from the questionnaire at any time. There are no direct benefits to you from this research.

Data Privacy

The researcher(s) are obliged to protect the anonymity of your data and no one can detect your identity according to the relevant personal data protection law. Researcher(s) will not use your answers and data for purposes other than the research. Also, the researcher(s) will not include your name or any other data that could identify you in the final project reports. The data will be kept secure through paper and electronic records in respective controlled-access storage facilities. Data will be retained for a period of at least 5 years after the end of the project, as required by the KMOP Research Ethics Committee.

You can contact the 'researchers' at the following email addresses:
margaritis.v@kmop.org and azari.a@kmop.org

You might wish to print this consent form for your records.

<https://kmop.limequery.com/admin/printablesurvey/ea/index/surveyid/783318>

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If you agree, please select consent to the following questions to proceed to the online survey. Otherwise, you will exit the questionnaire.

PARTNERS

ASSOCIATED PARTNERS

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Funded by the European Union, Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

There are 32 questions in this survey.

Consent

I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire

*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

<https://kmop.limequery.com/admin/printablesurvey/ea/index/surveyid/783318>

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I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age. *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

How often do you visit museums or/and art galleries? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

I usually visit museums and/or art galleries... *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

- In my hometown or near my place of permanent residence
- When I am travelling within my country of residence
- When I am travelling abroad
- I don't visit museums or art galleries

When you decide to engage with cultural content (eg. visit a museum, art gallery, theatre, see cultural content online, see open air events) what are your main reasons for doing so? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

- I want to learn about the cultural heritage of my country
- I want to learn about the cultural heritage of another country
- I want to learn about European cultural heritage
- I want to learn something that would be relevant to my personal life
- I look for intellectual stimulation
- I look for an emotionally engaging experience
- I want to spend time with my friends/family/other people
- I am visiting with an organised group
- I want to get away from the routine of my daily life
- I want to see an important tourist site
- Don't know
- Other:

Please indicate the importance of cultural experiences in your life, with 1 being not at all important and 10 being very important. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cultural experiences play important role in my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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I engage with cultural content online (e.g. following arts or history social media accounts, following contemporary artists, viewing cultural exhibitions online)

*

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

Weekly (or more)
 Monthly
 Less than monthly
 Never

I perceive museum and/or art gallery exhibitions as **unwelcoming**.
 (If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.)

*

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes
 No

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Please provide a reason:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[UNWELCOMING]' (I perceive museum and/or art gallery exhibitions as unwelcoming.(If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.)) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

Too crowded
 Not child-friendly
 Not accessible to me because I have a disability
 They are environments in which I don't feel comfortable / I feel out of place
 I feel boredom and fatigue
 Other:

If you would like, please specify your disability and/or access needs:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was at question '[UNWELCOMING2]' (Please provide a reason:) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

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I perceive museum and/or art exhibitions as being **unappealing**.
 (If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.)

*

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes
 No

Please provide a reason: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[UNAPPEALING]' (I perceive museum and/or art exhibitions as being unappealing.(If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.)) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

The content is not interesting to me
 The information is not presented in an engaging way
 Exhibitions are not interactive (e.g. I prefer interactive games or experiences)
 I prefer participating in group activities or workshops
 Other:

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I perceive museum and/or art gallery exhibitions as **not useful**.
 (If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes
 No

Please provide a reason: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[USEFUL]' (I perceive museum and/or art gallery exhibitions as not useful. (If you select 'yes' further options will be revealed.)) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

The content is not relevant to my daily life
 The exhibitions do not relate to my culture or personal experiences
 Visiting museums does not help me succeed in my goals
 Museums and/or art galleries do not provide the opportunity to socialise
 Other:

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According to your opinion, which of the following experiences do you expect to have in a museum and/or art gallery? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Select all that apply
 Please choose **all** that apply:

- Enhance my knowledge (e.g. about the arts, history, science or technology)
- Be moved by beauty
- Learn about my personal/family heritage and history
- Learn about my national/cultural heritage and history
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Feel a connection to something larger than myself (e.g. feelings of awe)
- Spend time with friends/family/other people
- Feel calm and relaxed
- Escape from the routine of my daily life
- Reflect on important contemporary issues
- Participate actively (e.g. interactive exhibitions, games, participatory artworks or workshops)
- Interact with knowledgeable experts (e.g. museum staff, guided tours, talks)
- Other:

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Please rank the following in order of importance. During my free time, it's most important to me to... *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

All your answers must be different and you must rank in order.
 Please select at most 12 answers
 Please number each box in order of preference from 1 to 12

- Be moved by beauty
- Enhance my knowledge (e.g. about the arts, history, science or technology)
- Learn about my personal/family heritage and history
- Learn about my national/cultural heritage and history
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Feel a connection to something larger than myself (e.g. spirituality)
- Spend time with friends/family/other people
- Feel calm and relaxed
- Escape from the routine of my daily life
- Reflect on important contemporary issues
- Participate actively (e.g. games, participatory workshops, community projects)
- Interact with knowledgeable experts (e.g. talks, seminars)

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Which of the following topics cause you anxiety?
 Please rate your level of anxiety about each topic from 1 (not at all anxious) to 10 (extremely anxious). *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My children's future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal health problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loneliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ageing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sentimental or affective relationship problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents' health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Failure to realise myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Which of the following topics cause you anxiety?
 Please rate your level of anxiety about each topic from 1 (not at all anxious) to 10 (extremely anxious). *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question '[CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '[OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Global war	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A second pandemic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too fast technological development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inequalities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Please rate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

*

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel confident in my ability to cope with change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident that people in my community / local region will contribute towards solving local problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident that others in my country and around the world will contribute towards solving global problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I desire to feel more connected with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I have the power to make a difference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to feel more connected to my personal/family heritage and history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to feel more connected to my national/cultural heritage and history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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I am interested in exploring museum and/or art gallery exhibits enhanced by advanced technological techniques like virtual reality. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes
 No
 I don't know

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Please rate how much you agree with each statement. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
I don't question what I learn in museums and/or art galleries because I am not an expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I visit museums and/or art galleries I make my own interpretations of what I see	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Museums and/or art galleries present the truth objectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Museums and/or art galleries are mostly representative of the diversity of lived experiences and communities in my country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I express my personal interpretation of cultural content (e.g. in exhibitions) through social media or other means	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
I prefer museums and/or art galleries that have a collaborative approach (e.g. participatory or community-led exhibitions) rather than a top-down approach (e.g. viewing exhibits and information as presented by the experts)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be interested in contributing to the development of exhibition content, or participating in community-led exhibitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please expand on your use of social media / other means in expressing your interpretation of cultural content: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' at question ' [CRITICAL]' (Please rate how much you agree with each statement. (I express my personal interpretation of cultural content (e.g. in exhibitions) through social media or other means)) and Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

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Please try to recall a cultural experience that particularly moved you or changed your perspective. Briefly describe this experience and how it affected you. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

Please provide any additional thoughts regarding factors that could improve your experience within museums and/or art galleries, or enable you to visit more often.
 (E.g. relating to exhibition content and presentation, participatory activities, museum facilities, cost/opening hours, accessibility, etc.)

*
 Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

Age (years) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

Gender *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

Other

Education *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Elementary / Primary School
- Incomplete High School / Secondary
- High School / Secondary
- Incomplete College / Bachelor's
- College / Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree or Higher

Other

Employment status *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Student
- Employed
- Self-employed
- Retired
- Unemployed

Other

Country of origin *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

Country of residence *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

Place of residence *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[CONSENT]" (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and
 Answer was "Yes" at question "[OVER18]" (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Choose one of the following answers
 Please choose **only one** of the following:

- City
- Town / suburbs
- Rural area

Other

Number of years in country of residence *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [CONSENT]' (I consent and I will complete the online questionnaire) and

Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [OVER18]' (I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.)

Please write your answer here:

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Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.