

Financial Self-Sustainability Strategies for Small Museums in Romania

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WPI



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MKBT - Make Better

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Abstract

Population decline in Romania has led to abandoned buildings and lower economic output, leaving some Romanian communities in need of revitalization. Museums preserve the history and culture of the local community while bringing in visitors, boosting the local economy. The goal of this project was to develop a guide with strategies that will help current and future small museums in Romania become more financially self-sustainable. We achieved this goal through interviews with museum administrators, analysis of budget reports, and participant observations. We designed a digital guide with recommended strategies including diversifying funding sources, forming local partnerships, and increasing visibility that small museums in Romania can use to become more financially self-sustainable.

Executive Summary

Tourism is known to significantly improve the economy of developing countries like Romania¹ where population decline has led to economic decline, resulting in a quarter of the population living below the poverty line and a rise of abandoned buildings. Repurposing buildings into museums is one way to revitalize impoverished communities.



Figure A: Picture of an abandoned home in Romania.

Museums are an expression of the social and cultural identity of a community, providing education about their histories to locals and visitors and promoting social cohesion and community empowerment.² Adaptive reuse, repurposing historic or abandoned buildings instead of tearing them down, is often less costly than demolition and allows the function of an existing building to change to reflect the needs of the current community while preserving the building's history.³

Museums can also help revitalize communities economically by generating revenue and creating jobs. To gain economic relevancy, many museums market themselves as tourist attractions that promote their products through general displays, special exhibits, shops, and cafes.⁴

While museums can be useful tools for urban revitalization, they need to be financially self-sustainable because communities often have limited financial resources to support museums.⁵ Western models of financially sustainable cultural sites often achieve sustainability through donations or grants from the private sector.⁵

The Make Better organization (MKBT) is a non-profit that is working to support local organizations in converting abandoned buildings into cultural sites. MKBT wants to ensure that museums will have the necessary funding to stay operational in the long term.

Our Goal and Objectives

The goal of this project was to develop a guide with strategies that will help current and future small museums in Romania become more financially self-sustainable. The following objectives helped us accomplish this goal:

1. Identify effective funding sources museums use inside and outside of Romania.
2. Compare methods of generating revenue between small museums in Romania and the U.S.

- Determine appropriate financial strategies that would best apply to small Romanian museums that have limited financial support.

Methodology

We interviewed three U.S. Museum administrators, seven Romanian museum administrators (Figure B), and two museum experts. We also analyzed financial documents and conducted observations in seven museums.

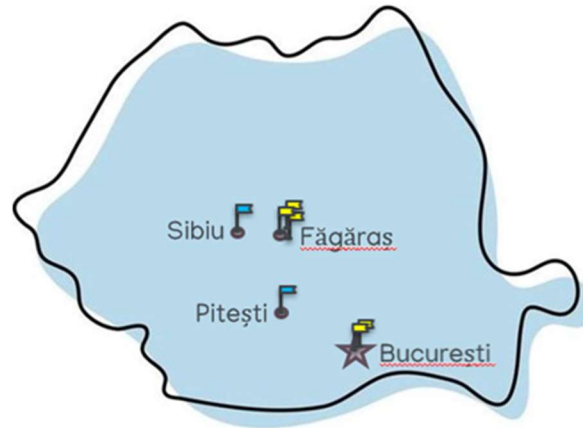


Figure B: Locations of museums we interviewed in Romania. Yellow flags indicate the museums that were visited in person and blue flags show the locations of museums who we interviewed through zoom.

Findings

Four themes emerged from our research: museum finances, community partnerships, visitor engagement, and visibility and marketing strategies.

Museums have multiple sources of funding, but financial support is inconsistent.

Funding sources vary, and no museum relies on just one due to inconsistencies. Common ways museums generate revenue include grants, donations, gift shops, and ticket sales (Figure C). Some unique strategies museums have used to increase revenue include renting out museum spaces for private events, providing museum memberships, and working with schools.

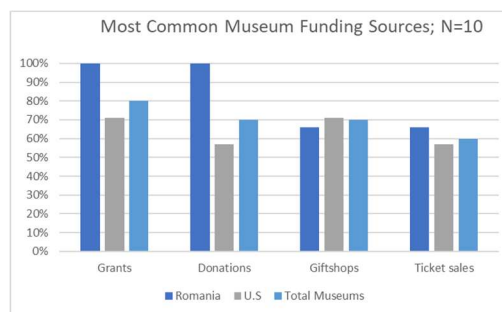


Figure C: Museums' most common funding sources.

Expense categories were much more consistent across the museums we interviewed. Most museums' top three expenses were staffing, utilities, and building maintenance.

Museums rely on community partnerships to reduce costs and attract visitors.

Being present in the local community and building connections with other museums helped museum staff reduce expenses and led to collaborations such as the Museum of Abandonment staff borrowing costly scanners from the Peasant Museum to create digital exhibits. All museums formed partnerships with local schools, gaining revenue on school field trips to the museum and saving costs by using student interns from high schools and universities. Both museum experts also stressed the importance of identifying the target demographic and creating exhibits for the identified audience. Examples include when the Museum of Russian Icons implemented bilingual exhibits to appeal to Spanish and Portuguese speaking visitors. This brings in a new audience to the museum.

Visitor engagement encourages repeat visitors.

While some museums incorporated interactive digital displays, others invited visitors to participate in the creation of an exhibit. The Museum of Abandonment uses virtual reality to fully immerse visitors as seen in Figure D (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 4/11/2023).



Figure D: This figure shows two team members experiencing the Museum of Abandonment through VR.

Another strategy to increase visitor engagement was to find a way for visitors to create a personal connection with the museum (T. Jain, personal communication, 4/6/2023). If the visitor experiences a special moment or helps contribute to the museum in some way, the visitor may be left with a feeling of nostalgia and therefore more likely to return to a museum.

Museums attract more visitors, generate more revenue, and reduce marketing costs with greater visibility.

All museum administrators we interviewed had a website and used social media to promote themselves for the purpose of saving marketing costs. Some museums we visited were locked

during operating hours, which made it more difficult for visitors to stop by the museum. Museums located near popular tourist attractions saw increases in their visitor numbers which indirectly increased revenue (H. Pîrău, personal communication, 3/28/2023).

Recommendations & Conclusions

From these findings, we discovered that financial self-sustainability involves direct and indirect methods of funding. We created four recommendations:

1. Diversify Revenue Streams

Museums should use common funding methods like grants, ticket sales, and gift shops. They should also use unique funding methods like venue rentals, special tours, and providing accommodations.

2. Form Community Partnerships

By partnering with local businesses and co-hosting events, museums can increase their credibility and reduce costs. Museums should hire interns and volunteers to reduce expenses. They should also network with other museums to build relationships and create opportunities for support such as sharing resources.

3. Capitalize on Physical and Online Visibility

Museums can promote themselves on a limited marketing budget by increasing their visibility. Using large and easy-to-read signs near popular attractions will increase their visibility. Museums should also use websites and social media as their main method of promotion to save costs.

4. Implement Opportunities for Visitors to make Personal Connections

Museums should integrate interactive exhibits such as digital components or physically interactive exhibits. They should also include exhibits that visitors can contribute to.

The team created a guide for MKBT that provides strategies museum clients can implement to become financially sustainable. By making museums self-sustainable, they will be able to continue educating the community and preserving history and culture for many years to come.

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Authorship Table

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1.0 Introduction

Tourism is known to significantly improve the economy of developing countries like Romania (Khan et al., 2020) where population decline has led to an economic lag leaving behind abandoned buildings and a quarter of the population living below the poverty line. However, in the past couple of decades, tourism has contributed to only 2-3% of Romania's GDP (Surugiu et al., 2009). The combined effects of the fall of communism, a lack of government investment in cultural sites, and population decline, especially in more rural areas, have contributed to Romania's abundance of abandoned buildings and made it more difficult for organizations to preserve and share their region's culture, histories, and traditions with potential visitors. Repurposing abandoned buildings as museums can meaningfully contribute to the economic growth and overall well-being of a community while promoting tourism.

The Make Better organization (MKBT) supports local organizations in urban revitalization, such as converting abandoned buildings into museums or visitor centers. MKBT wants to ensure that museums will have the necessary funding to stay operational in the long term. The goal of our project was to create a guide of strategies small museums in Romania can use to become financially self-sustainable.

In this report, we explored the effects of urban decline and abandoned buildings on communities, discussed how to revitalize buildings with museums, and examined current financial models museums are using to achieve self-sustainability. We then discussed our methodology, which includes interviewing museum administration in the U.S. and Romania and museum experts. Finally, we presented our findings and design strategies that will assist MKBT in creating financially self-sustainable museums.

2.0 Background

2.1 Local Effects of Urban Decline and Abandoned Buildings

Urban decline is the deterioration of a city brought on by increased poverty, depopulation, failing infrastructure, and poor socioeconomic circumstances and decisions (Libretext, 2021). Eastern Europe shows increased signs of urban decline due to its history of disinvestment and communism. Since the end of communism in 1989, Romania's population has declined by over 18%, from 23 million to 19 million (Population, 2021) due to low birth rates, high mortality rates, high rates of abortion, and "brain drain", or emigration of younger people in search of better jobs (Otovescu & Otovescu, 2019; "Macrotrends," n.d.; Statista, 2021; Valentin, 2012).

The decrease in population and workforce in some regions leads to facility shutdowns and therefore less economic output and lowered community engagement. This in turn results in fewer social outlets and a rise in abandoned buildings (Elshof, 2014; Ministerie, 2014). When Romania transitioned from capitalism to communism, many private properties were stripped from their owners and given to the state (Serban, 2014). After the fall of communism, properties were left unclaimed or were under long legal battles over ownership disputes. This along with the large decline in population resulted in numerous abandoned buildings across the country (Tudor et al., 2011). Empty buildings can cause a decrease in property value, increased

vandalism within a community, and lead to organizations and people unwilling to invest in the local area, further diminishing quality of life (Cole, 2021).

2.2 Successful Methods of Revitalization

Urban revitalization refers to efforts put in place to boost a community culturally and economically when it is facing economic decline, community dereliction, and growing unemployment (Ramlee et al, 2015). Some of the methods cities have used to regenerate urban areas include introducing more cultural events and installing cultural facilities such as museums (Grodach, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). These methods encourage economic growth and pride in where one lives, as well as providing a space for the community to gather.

Museums also encourage the expression of the social and cultural identity of the community by providing education about their histories to locals and visitors and by promoting social cohesion and community empowerment (Colbert, 2011; Scott, 2007). One way they do so is by holding cultural events that showcase the local culture, history, and art (Grodach, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). While these events help build a sense of community and create opportunities for small businesses and local artists to be connected, they do not necessarily generate revenue because the events are more focused on community building (Grodach, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). Installing cultural facilities such as galleries, performing arts centers, and museums is a more economical method of cultural revitalization because they promote the importance of culture and attracts tourists (Grodach, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). Museums specifically help preserve the culture and history of a community (Colbert, 2011).

2.2.1 Repurposing Abandoned Buildings as Cultural Facilities

Often, buildings that house a museum are part of the cultural history, and therefore repurposing historic buildings as museums is a critical step in cultural preservation (Günçe & Misirlisoy, 2014; Kee, 2014). Adaptive reuse, repurposing historic or abandoned buildings instead of tearing them down, is often less costly than demolition and allows the function of an existing building to change to reflect the needs of the current community while preserving the building's history (Ali et al., 2018; Kee, 2014).

There are multiple instances of non-profit organizations or municipalities repurposing buildings into museums. For example, in Tlemcen, Algeria, the city converted a Koranic school into a Tlemcen museum, a French town hall into a museum of art and history, and a mosque into an Islamic calligraphy museum (Djebbour, 2019). In Milan, Italy, the Municipality of Milan converted Sforzesco Castle into a massive museum with four internal museum categories: Archeological, ancient art, decorative arts, and musical instruments (Günçe & Misirlisoy, 2014). It was important to the community to preserve these historic buildings and at the same time update their functions and use (Günçe & Misirlisoy, 2014).

2.2.2 Benefits of Museums Used for Urban Revitalization

Developing museums as a strategy for urban revitalization has multiple benefits. According to Colbert (2011, p. 609), researchers have found that museums in cities “improve quality of life, attract visitors, and improve city image.” They also produce long-term social value, which includes personal development, social cohesion, and community empowerment (Scott, 2007).

These factors aid in revitalizing a community in a way that provides cultural sustainability. In Australia, the Council of Australian University Museums and Collections (CAUMAC) works with various universities to install museums within the universities showcasing student assignments or research (Simpson et al., 2005). These museums build community engagement by working with schools to bring in student tours, which inspire students to consider pursuing university while simultaneously conveying the importance of cultural values (Simpson et al., 2005). By creating a relationship between schools and university museums, social cohesion is bolstered and as a result, the community is more connected (Simpson et al., 2005).

Museums can also help to revitalize communities economically by generating revenue and creating jobs. In 2017, registered U.S. museums contributed \$50 billion to the national GDP and created over 700,000 jobs (American Alliance of Museums, 2017). To gain economic relevancy, many museums have chosen to market themselves as tourist attractions that promote their products through general displays, special exhibits, shops, and cafes (Prideaux, 1999). Small museums bring in many types of people, including cultural tourists, who are “people from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution” (Silberberg, 1995, p. 361). Cultural tourists often pay to see special exhibits and buy souvenirs, contributing to the community’s economy (Silberberg, 1995). Completed restoration of the castle ruins in Chęciny, Poland increased tourist traffic and increased interest in the castle by 60% (Doroz-Turek, 2019) demonstrating an example of how museums can increase tourism. By bringing the community together and simultaneously being an attraction for tourists, developing museums is a vital method in revitalizing urban areas of decline.

2.3 Models and Strategies for Museum Financial Sustainability

While museums can be useful tools for urban revitalization, they need to be financially self-sustainable because communities often have limited financial resources to support museums (Bukvić et al., 2018). Western models of financially sustainable cultural sites often achieve sustainability through donations or grants from the private sector (Bukvić et al., 2018). In the U.S., private funding, independent national grants, and effective marketing have allowed small museums to rely less on the government for financial help (American Alliance of Museums, 2017; Institute of Museum and Library services, 2022). Alternatively, museums in Eastern Europe are primarily funded by local government economies, which leads to rigidity and leaves cultural sites heavily dependent on the strength of local economies and therefore vulnerable to collapse or decline (Bukvić et al., 2018). Some Eastern European countries have been able to find ways to work within this rigidity, while other countries find that a lack of proper knowledge and support is a significant challenge in attaining financial sustainability (Vikmane and Lake, 2021; Bukvić et al., 2018). In Latvia, museum administrators maintained financial sustainability by engaging with the community and providing both social and professional services, such as specialist advice, certification, expertise, and assessment (Vikmane and Lake, 2021). Latvian museums were able to increase revenue and the number of returning visitors by working with local businesses and implementing programs that boost tourism (Vikmane and Lake, 2021). Conversely, researchers in Croatia found that 90% of museums and cultural sites were publicly owned and received most of their funding through the government, and 45% of museums lack

sufficient financial knowledge or resources to keep the institution financially sustainable (Bukvić et al., 2018).

To maintain financial sustainability, museum administration must be knowledgeable about museum operations including expenses and revenue generation (Lord et al., 2012). Potential expenses for a museum include utilities, staff wages, maintenance costs, and exhibits (Lord et al., 2012). A museum may generate revenue through private events or sponsorships, local or national funding, grants, ticket sales, special exhibits, gift shops, and memberships (Marty & Buchanan, 2022). While high-profile fundraising events and private foundations constitute a major source of revenue for larger museums (Gibbs, 2022), smaller museums have limited fundraising opportunities; therefore, encouraging visitor donations and marketing becomes very important (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2014). Researchers found that when museum staff repeatedly asked visitors to donate, visitors were less likely to make donations (Saeri et al., 2022). People were more influenced to donate by the behavior of other visitors rather than the actions of the museum staff themselves (Saeri et al., 2022). Donations also increased when people were confident the money would go to the appropriate place and when museums provided visitors with a good reason to donate (Saeri et al., 2022).

Researchers have also developed marketing models for small museums. The Sustainable Heritage Tourism Marketing (SHTM) model emerged from a study involving 20 small cultural heritage museums in the United States (Chhabra, 2009). This model states that the best combination of marketing strategies museums can employ is a mix of interpersonal and impersonal approaches based on the perceived benefit each approach brings to the local community and existing partnerships (Chhabra, 2009). Currently, word of mouth is one of the quickest ways to spread information to potential visitors from the surrounding communities or communities of interest (Hausmann, 2012). Other researchers have found evidence to suggest that the 7p's model (product, promotion, place, price, physical evidence, people, process) informs strategies that encourage visitors to attend small local museums (Liu, 2021). One museum educator at a small historic house museum in the U.S. calculated direct and indirect costs of operations to determine how much to charge visitors. This allowed them to not only support future endeavors but also create a financially sustainable education program (Alleyne, 2010).

The 7p's model encourages museums to employ promotional marketing strategies (e.g. brochures, texts, posters) that are tailored to their unique visitor experience (Liu, 2021) as well as to consider how museum design, layout, or programs can attract visitors to museums. A museum's internal layout, aesthetics, interactive qualities, and external environment can create loyalty in a museum visitor and enhance their experience (Han et al., 2019). If visitors view museum environments more positively, they are more likely to visit again, spread beneficial word of mouth, and have a positive experience overall (Han et al., 2019).

2.4 Make Better Organization and Museum Revitalization

MKBT is an organization that is interested in revitalizing declining communities through the creation of financially sustainable cultural sites, including repurposing Romania's many abandoned historic buildings to serve as museums. MKBT is both a non-governmental organization (NGO) and a consultancy firm established in 2014 that focuses on housing policies,

land management, and urban economic revitalization. They are funded by their consultations, the Romanian American Foundation (RAF), and grants.

MKBT is helping individuals and organizations repurpose abandoned buildings to create cultural sites. Our team worked with MKBT and conducted interviews with museum administration in both Romania and the U.S. to create adaptable strategies for smaller Romanian museums to be financially self-sustainable.

3.0 Methodology

The goal of this project was to develop a guide containing strategies that will help current and future small museums in Romania become more financially self-sustainable. The following objectives helped us accomplish this goal:

1. Identify effective funding sources museums use inside and outside of Romania.
2. Compare methods of generating revenue between small museums in Romania and the U.S.
3. Determine appropriate financial strategies that would best apply to small Romanian museums that have limited financial support.

Our project took place in Bucharest, Romania from March 13th, 2023, to April 28th, 2023. We conducted a series of interviews and observations to understand museum operations and community involvement. We used the information gathered to develop a sustainability plan that will guide small museums in Romania to be more financially self-sustainable.

3.1 Objective 1: Identify effective funding sources museums use inside and outside of Romania.

MKBT was interested in understanding how Romania might incorporate a free market approach to museum funding, so the team researched different funding strategies small museums used in the U.S. in addition to Romania.

3.1.1 Interviews with Administrators of Small U.S. Museums

To better understand sources of revenue and the level of financial sustainability of U.S. museums, the team identified three museums in Massachusetts (Table 3.1) that seemed comparable in size to the Romanian museums and were housed in repurposed buildings.

Table 3.1: Interviews with Museum Personnel in U.S. and Romania

Museum	Location (MA)	Interview Question Version	Interviewee	Interviewee Position
Metropolitan Waterworks Museum	Boston	1	Eric Peterson	Executive Director
Museum of Russian Icons	Clinton	2	Melanie Trottier	Executive Coordinator
New England Quilt Museum	Lowell	2	Nora Palermo	Executive Director
Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană al României (MNAC)	Bucharest	1	Daniela Calciu,	Museum Director
Muzeul Țării Făgărașului “Valer Literat” (Făgăraș County Museum)	Făgăraș	1	Horia Pîrău	Museum Curator
Muzeul de Panze si Povesti (Fabrics and Stories Museums)	Mândra, Brasov	1	Alina Zară	Museum Founder
Șona	Șona, Brasov	1	Diana Iabrasu	Museum Director and Archivist
Alma Vii	Sibiu	2	Caroline Fernolend	President of Mihai Eminescu Trust
Memorialul Închisoarea Pitești (Pitești Prison Memorial)	Pitești	2	Maria Axinte	Museum Founder
Muzeul Abandonului (Museum of Abandonment)	Digital	2	Oana Drăgulescu Ioana Călinescu Iris Șerban	Co-Founder Co-founder Digital archivist, museologist
Muzeul Satului Venețian	Veneția de Jos, Brasov	N/A	N/A	N/A
Muzeul Boierilor Venetiei Fagarasului	Venetia de Jos, Brasov	N/A	N/A	N/A

We set up Zoom interviews with U.S. museum administrators to discuss how their museums earn enough revenue to sustain their current practices and future endeavors. The team conducted interviews in pairs with one interviewer and one notetaker. Before each interview, the team obtained consent from participants and asked permission to record audio and video for notetaking and transcription purposes (Appendix A). The team transcribed audio files using DoveTail software.

In our initial interviews with Romanian and U.S. museum administrators, we asked about operations, including revenue sources, expenses, marketing strategies, local partnerships, and events (Appendix B). After conducting four interviews and interviewing museum expert Nina Simon, we restructured our questions to better understand how museums engage with the community while still gathering information on their means of revenue and expenses (Appendix C).

3.1.2 Interviews with Administrators of Small Romanian Museums

MKBT initially provided the team with contacts from six small museums to interview. We also researched other museums in Romania and selected museums to contact based on staff

size, average number of visitors, and location. MKBT first contacted museum administrators to introduce the team. We then contacted museums and identified individuals from seven museums to interview based on contact responses and distance from Bucharest.

The interviews took between 45-60 minutes to complete. For in-person interviews, all team members were present for each interview and rotated the roles of interviewer and notetaker. We conducted three interviews over Zoom as well. We were unable to interview staff at two museums located in Venetia de Jos (Table 3.1) due to a language barrier though we visited these museums in person and conducted observations.

3.1.3 Observations within Museums

Observations helped us understand the scope of the museums, including the size, ticket prices, and the museum's atmosphere (Appendix E). We made observations and took pictures of the museums after each interview. Museum observations allowed us to better understand the physical atmosphere of a museum, which could not be gained without physically being present.

3.1.4 Expert Interviews

We also interviewed museum experts who have worked with multiple struggling museums to attract more visitors. Our first interview was with Ms. Simon, a museum expert and former museum director at the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz, California who has provided consultation to more than a hundred museums. Our second expert interview was with Tejshvi Jain. Ms. Jain is the founder of an NGO called Rereeti which works towards revitalizing museums in India. Both women have worked with museums all over the world. We asked them about effective strategies museums can use to attract visitors, make exhibits more interactive, and how to plan community-oriented events (Appendix D).

3.2 Objective 2: Compare methods of generating revenue between small museums in Romania and the U.S.

To compare the revenue generating strategies museums in the U.S. and Romania use, we examined the following criteria: largest revenue category, greatest expenses, marketing methods, grants, and donations (Lord et al., 2012; Marty & Buchanan, 2022). We also compared strategies that did not rely on government funding, focusing on how different museums in the U.S. and Romania engage their local community, the community of interest, and visitors. To draw comparisons, we looked at strategies that would be more suitable to less populated, rural areas, which helped us to identify strategies that would be applicable in Romania.

3.2.1 Document Analysis of Museum Financial Reports

Two museum administrators shared financial documents to supplement the information they provided during their interviews. These documents included means of generating income and a summary of visitor frequency. The team examined this information to identify similarities and differences in their funding breakdowns and visitor frequency.

3.3 Objective 3: Determine appropriate strategies that would best apply to small Romanian museums that have limited financial support

3.3.1 Interview Analysis

Each team member read through the interviews identifying themes and topics that consistently came up in interview transcripts. Based on our interviews and the categories used for U.S. and Romanian museum comparison, we combined the themes into the following categories: funding, visibility, and community partnership. Within each theme, we marked similarities and differences between museums and what strategies were most effective or common. We compared these findings and themes to museum experts' recommendations on how to engage the community. The museum experts we interviewed worked with many small museums from Romania and areas of the world that were similar in economic and historical background, and they were able to inform us of the feasibility of applying certain financial sustainability strategies in Romania.

4.0 Findings

This chapter details our findings based on the data we collected from our interviews, observations, and document analysis. From our research, five themes emerged: visibility, community partnerships, visitor engagement, marketing strategies, and museum finances.

When we visited museums in Romania (Figure 4.1), we were always greeted by friendly faces excited about sharing their museum. Some were newer buildings or newly renovated like the National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC) in Bucharest while others were hundreds of years old like the Făgăraș Fortress. Upon entering many of the older buildings, we were surprised by the chill of the rooms due to the stone walls and lack of heating. While some of the buildings lacked vibrancy, inside we were often greeted with bright colors and a rich history.

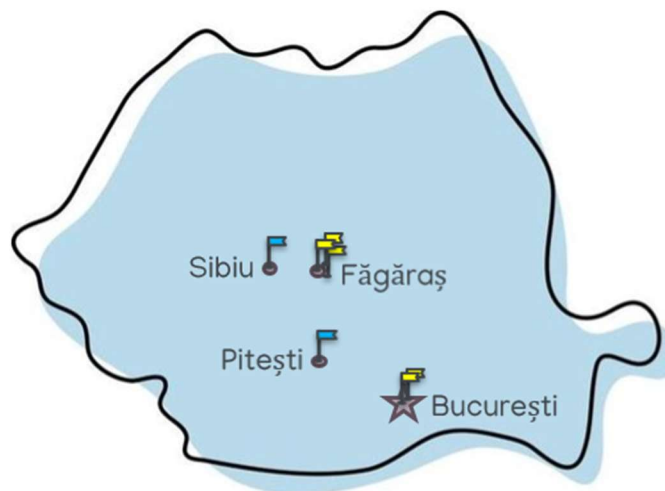


Figure 4.1: Map of museums we interviewed in Romania. Yellow flags indicate in-person interviews and blue flags indicate zoom interviews.

4.1 Capitalizing on Location and Visibility Affects Visitor Frequency

Through our observations and online interviews, we noticed that the location can greatly impact the number of visitors. For example, in 2013, the Huffington Post ranked Făgăraș Fortress the second-best castle in the world, which generated free publicity for the museum inside and increased the number of museum visitors from 20,000 per year to 160,000 (H. Pîrău, personal communication, 03/28/2023). In Lowell, MA, more than 20% of the museum visitors discover the New England Quilt Museum while visiting a well-known national park nearby (N. Palermo, personal communication, 3/31/2023).

In contrast, the MNAC's location in Romania's parliament building makes people less likely to visit because of the building's abundant security and the Romanian public's mistrust of the government (D. Calciu, personal communication 03/23/2023). We observed the high level of security during our visit to the museum as a large number of guards, both inside and outside the parliament complex, made us feel uncomfortable.

4.1.1 Accessibility of Museums Can Impact Unplanned Visitors

The accessibility of museums also plays a role in attracting visitors. Melanie Trottier from the Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton, MA, told us that the building is “really visible right on the Central Park area,” which helps them attract unplanned visitors and makes it easy to plan and host events in the park, boosting the visibility of the museum. On the contrary, the Metropolitan Waterworks Museum is located in a heavily industrialized area outside Boston with no commercial buildings that is not easily accessible by public transportation, so it gets very few unplanned visitors (E. Peterson, personal communication 03/22/2023).

4.2 By Addressing Community Needs and Forming Partnerships, Museums Become an Integral Part of Their Immediate Community and Therefore Bring in More Visitors

4.2.1 Addressing Needs of the Community

Museums that recognize and meet community needs become an integral part of their community. We spoke with museum experts Nina Simon and Tejshvi Jain, who both indicated that museum staff need to consider their target audience in the surrounding community. Ms. Simon stated, “I like to think about who is ‘the almost comes’... who is coming to similar experiences...who is nearby, who might be comfortable and confident walking in the door?” Once the target demographic is identified, programming and interactivity can be planned around them (N. Simon, personal communication, 3/29/2023).

Making small changes gives the “almost comes” a reason to visit the museums. Eric Peterson, the director of the Waterworks Museum, said, “We found out that within the matter of a few months [after opening], there was nobody coming to the museum... we had to have family connections, we had to connect to the neighborhood around us. We had to have stuff for kids.” As a result, they implemented successful programs working with schools starting as young as kindergarten. In an interview with the director of the Museum of Russian Icons, Ms. Trottier said the staff noticed their community had a large Spanish and Portuguese population. In response, they created additional signs in Portuguese and Spanish and curated a bilingual exhibit that compared Orthodox icons with Mexican retablos (Figure 4.2). Ms. Trottier worked with contacts at Clinton's Spanish American Center “[who] were kind enough to give us input as we were

planning.” Making these changes led to higher visitation from these groups (M. Trottier, personal communication 03/31/2023).



Figure 4.2: A newspaper clip from March 10th, 2023, sharing the news about the bilingual exhibition.

4.2.2 Engaging the Community Through Hosting Events

Some museums host events to appeal to their targeted demographic, who may not be currently coming to the museum. For example, the Waterworks Museum hosts Water Fest, a free-to-enter family-centered festival that attracts a wider range of people outside of their typical audience. According to Mr. Peterson, “We are able to break that barrier of the particular location, our neighborhood, and get past that into the larger community of Boston.” This free event covered educational topics like climate change and challenges to the world’s water resources in a kid-friendly way and offers games for the whole family to enjoy together (E. Peterson, personal communication, 3/22/2023).

4.2.3 Ensuring a Presence in the Local Community

Maria Axinte, administrator of the Pitești Prison Memorial Museum, noticed that Pitești residents did not come to their museum or even know it existed. She said, “...people do not feel like tourists in their own city...people do not really get this idea that you can do cultural stuff in the city...whenever our visitors would ask for people to tell them where the museum was, they would always answer with, there is no museum here.” After covid, the museum started to have events at night. “It is impossible for people not to be curious,” said Ms. Axinte. After establishing its place as an integral part of the community, the majority of museum visitors in 2023 were either from the city or friends the locals had brought with them to the museum (M Axinte, personal communication, 4/5/2023).

4.2.4 Being Present in the Museum Community to Gain Connections

Museums mutually benefited from building relationships and having better communication with each other. For example, Oana Drăgulinescu co-founder of the Museum of Abandonment stated, “We have many partners that are offering support that is not translated in money.” These relationships create opportunities for shared resources, reducing expenses. Such resources include technology, venue space, and ideas for events and exhibits. For example, The Museum of Abandonment staff borrowed costly scanners from the Peasant Museum to create their digital exhibits (Ms. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 4/12/2023). Museum partnerships also lead to collaborations on smaller promotional deals. For example, the Museum of Russian Icons has an agreement with another museum, where buying one ticket allows entry into both museums (M. Trotter, personal communication, 3/31/2023).

Museums also want to target a younger audience to pass down cultural traditions and heritage to the next generations. The Pitești Prison Museum administration invites former political prisoners to their events, knowing that this is the kind of event young people are interested in attending. The museum also added a new section dedicated to younger children that provides age-appropriate messaging so children can enjoy and better understand the museum. These changes brought in more families from the community. Young people can share the information they learned with others keeping the stories and the museum itself alive.

4.3 Visitor Engagement Encourages Repeat Visitors

4.3.1 Engaging Visitors Through Interactive Exhibits

Ms. Simon revealed that having interactive exhibits is a great way to enhance the visitor experience. Museums use exhibits with varying levels of interaction to engage visitors, from a touch screen to a completely immersive experience. The Waterworks Museum has incorporated interactive digital displays, where one can choose a short video to watch, and plans to implement more of these displays based on the positive community feedback (E. Peterson, personal communication, 3/22/2023). A more immersive example is the Museum of Abandonment, a portable virtual reality (VR) museum that allows visitors wearing VR headsets to walk through the museum and see exhibits including pictures, videos, objects, and documents. The full immersion of the visitor in the virtual world creates a unique experience and helps the visitor form a more intimate connection with the subject matter. This museum's popularity can be seen through their social media success, gaining over 8,700 followers on Facebook within a year and a half (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 4/11/2023).

4.3.2 Personal Connection to the Museum Creates a Memorable Experience

Another strategy, proposed by museum expert Ms. Jain, was to find a way to create a personal connection with the museum. If the visitor experiences a special moment or helps contribute to the museum in some way, the visitor may be left with a feeling of nostalgia and therefore more likely to return to a museum. For example, Ms. Jain noted that having a plaque beside an artifact that mentions those who donated towards the restoration of that artifact might encourage those who donated to return. Another project Ms. Jain worked on was an immersive experience in the form of an online interactive exhibit. It is based on a story narrative format where the visitors choose how their virtual characters would act in a predetermined scenario. Despite being online, making these decisions activates empathy in the audience, creating a personal connection and a memorable experience (T. Jain, personal communication, 4/06/2023).

Inviting visitors to actively participate in museum exhibits was a strategy Ms. Simon suggested. For example, a local museum completed a project involving making a giant fish sculpture out of metal. Instead of having the metal worker make hundreds of scales for the fish, he allowed visitors to make them under his guidance instead, regardless of age (N. Simon, personal communication, 03/29/2023). Many of these visitors later came back to see the sculpture they helped create (N. Simon, personal communication, 3/29/2023).

An event that inspired an emotional connection among visitors was a one-night event hosted by the Museum of Abandonment. They invited people to sew the names of abandoned children onto pieces of clothing, and then these pieces were hung up together to create an exhibit (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 4/11/2023). The other half of this exhibit was the launching of their application which enabled the museum to be viewed online. What founders Ms. Drăgulinescu and Ioana Călinescu noticed was the younger visitors guided their parents and grandparents through the technology, while the older generation taught the younger ones how to sew. This resulted in meaningful interaction between visitors and the exhibit and among visitors themselves, encouraging people to share their stories with the museum.

4.4 Inexpensive marketing strategies are effective and can reduce costs for small museums.

All the museums we interviewed had a limited budget for marketing and therefore had to rely on their ability to create effective and free publicity. Through our interviews we discovered the most consistent and effective marketing strategies were word of mouth, social media (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook), a website, and local partnerships (E. Peterson, personal communication, 3/22/2023). Mr. Peterson of the Waterworks Museum said that word of mouth was far more effective than paid publicity.

4.4.1 Using social media and websites to promote museums in a cost-effective manner.

Facebook in Romania is an effective communication method and marketing tool (M. Calciu, personal communication, 3/23/2023), but Instagram is more effective for international audiences (M. Axinte, personal communication, 4/05/2023). Social media can be used for other purposes as well. For example, Diana Iabrasu, a museum archivist and director from Șona, uses it to connect different NGOs in the Făgăraș region of Romania to share information, resources, and volunteers among different villages and projects. Additionally, museum expert Ms. Jain expressed the importance of websites, stating that, “in this age and day, you have to have a website.”

Strategies to establish an online presence are free and effective. However, as social media evolves, it can be hard for older generations to keep up with these platforms. Alina Zară of the Fabrics and Stories Museum stated that she was looking for someone more knowledgeable about social media to take over the museum accounts. While hiring a new person is not always feasible in a museum’s budget, a solution that museum expert Ms. Jain offered was hiring university students as interns. The students can get experience or credit in the social science or humanities fields and, in turn, help the museum with social media and marketing, allowing the museum to reach wider audiences.

4.4.2 Marketing more effectively through local community collaboration.

Several museums highlighted how local partnerships can help promote a museum. Ms. Simon, museum expert, discussed how museums who partner with local organizations can help build their credibility and increase the success of the events they hold. Just by putting the name of an organization on the promotional materials or having that organization share event details with their audience, the museums can attract a larger audience, because the event is promoted by an organization that people already trust. Ms. Trottier disclosed that the Museum of Russian Icons specifically chose not to put a cafe in their building so that they could promote local businesses, who promoting them in return. Ms. Palermo of the New England Quilt Museum often works with other cultural organizations in her area to host joint events. On different days during these events, one museum will host the main attraction and encourage visitors to seek out the other museums on following days.

4.5 Revenue and Expense Categories

From each museum we interviewed, we gathered information about their revenue and expenses. As seen in Table 4.2, a museum’s income can come from a wide range of sources. Fifty percent of the museums we interviewed received much of their funding from a unique outside source specific to that museum's location or ownership (Table 4.1). For example, the Waterworks Museum is part of a complex of buildings that were turned into condos, from which the museum receives about half of their budget due to requirements made by the state of Massachusetts when the museum was created. In Romania, the Pitești Prison Memorial is mostly funded by the family who owns the museum.

Table 4.1: Largest funding sources per museum

<i>Museum</i>	<i>Largest Funding Source per Museum</i>
<i>Metropolitan Waterworks Museum</i>	Money from Condo Owners
<i>Museum of Russian Icons</i>	Endowment
<i>New England Quilt Museum</i>	Donations
<i>MNAC</i>	Government funding
<i>Făgăraș County Museum</i>	Ticket sales
<i>Fabrics and Stories Museum</i>	Fabrics shop
<i>Șona</i>	Ștefan Câlția NGO (which is funded through donations)
<i>Alma Vii</i>	Selling Meals/Food
<i>Pitești Prison Memorial</i>	Family money
<i>Museum of Abandonment</i>	Grants

Table 4.2: Table of museums interviewed and how each generates revenue. All information was gathered from interviews and financial documents provided by interviewees.

		Grants	Donations	Gift Shops	Ticket Sales	Venue Rental	Memberships	Public Funding	Special Exhibits	Specialized Tours	Other
US Museums	Metropolitan Waterworks Museum	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes
	NE Quilts Museum	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
	Museum of Russian Icons	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Romanian Museums	MNAC	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
	Făgăraș County Museum	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no
	Șona	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
	Fabrics and Stories Museums	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
	Pitești Prison Memorial	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes
	Museum of Abandonment	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
	Alma VII	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no

4.5.1 Most Common Revenue Strategies

Although 80% of museums interviewed have utilized grants as a source of funding, our interviews informed us that grant funding is very inconsistent, unreliable, and time consuming (Figure 4.3). We also found that U.S. museums have more options of receiving grants (N. Palermo, personal communication, 03/31/2023) compared to Romania, where funding for cultural projects is more limited (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 04/11/2023). Some museums like the Museum of Abandonment have had great success in receiving grants, receiving € 200,000 in just two years (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 04/11/2023). Ms. Palermo said some years grants are their largest source of income and other years they receive a much smaller amount. Because of this, she does not include grants when putting together the museum’s budget. Although grants for Romanian cultural projects are few, there is a public interest in art and history and because of this people are willing to donate to museums (O. Drăgulinescu, personal communication, 04/11/2023). As can be seen in Figure 4.3, 70% of museums interviewed reported receiving donations.

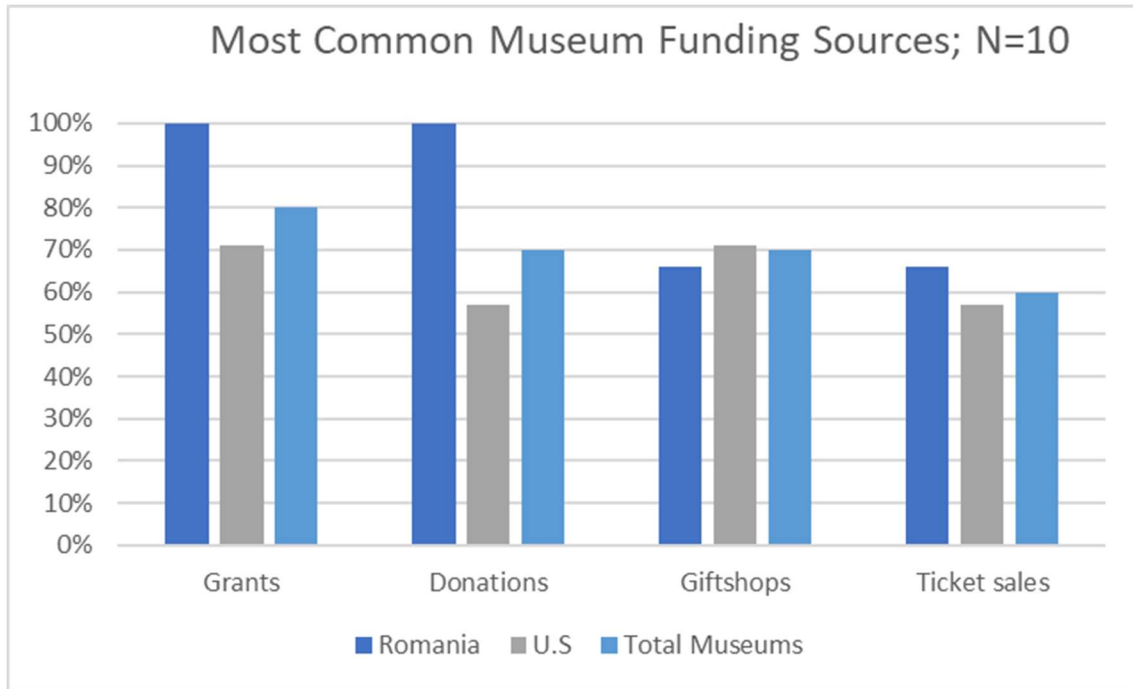


Figure 4.3: Museums’ most common funding sources.

Tickets are another source of revenue although they tend to vary according to seasons. The Făgăraș Fortress Museum reported receiving about 300 visitors a day over a weekend in March, as opposed to 2,000 a day during weekends in the summer months (H. Pîrău, personal communication, 03/28/2023). According to Horia Pîrău, ticket sales fund the museum’s restoration. For other museums, ticket sales are a measure of a museum’s success. The MNAC reports ticket sales to the Romanian Ministry of Culture to determine how much funding they will receive for the next year (D. Calciu, personal communication, 03/23/2023). Forty percent of the museums we interviewed did not have entry fees at all, as seen in Table 4.2. The most common reason was to make visitors feel more welcome, especially in the museums featuring local history and culture (O. Drăgulescu, personal communication, 04/11/2023). Gift shop sales and sales of other items have the potential to make a consistent amount of money and support museum operations. The Făgăraș County Museum has a large gift shop located at the end of the museum with a variety of souvenirs. The Museum of Fabrics and Stories and Alma Vii make most of its money through shop sales (C. Fernolend, personal communication, 04/14/2023; A. Zară, personal communication, 03/28/2023).

Expense categories were much more consistent across the museums we interviewed. Most museums’ top three expenses were staffing, utilities, and building maintenance. Table 4.2 shows a more detailed breakdown for each museum.

Table 4.3: Expense categories of each museum interviewed. The “other” category was only included for significant expenses.

		Staffing	Utilities	Maintenance	Exhibitions	Marketing	Other
US Museums	Metropolitan Waterworks Museum	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
	NE Quilts Museum	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
	Museum of Russian Icons	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Romanian Museums	MNAC	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
	Făgăraș County Museum	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
	Șona	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
	Workshop Mandra Chic	yes	no	no	no	no	no
	Pitesti Prison Memorial	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
	Museum of Abandonment	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
	Alma Vii	no	yes	yes	no	no	no

4.6 Limitations

As to be expected, we encountered some limitations while collecting data for the project. Language posed a very small barrier most times, but for a few museums we visited, especially in smaller villages, people who showed us the museum did not speak English, which limited the information we could get from them. Some museums were difficult to access due to the lack of local public transportation, making it more difficult to conduct observations.

5.0 Recommendations

From our interviews and museum visits, we discovered that financial self-sustainability involves direct and indirect methods of funding. While it is important to focus on direct methods of revenue generation, it is also important for museum staff to remain involved in the community, passing down culture and stories to generations that will remain culturally and financially invested in the museum for many years to come. We identified four targeted areas that help museums to become more financially self-sustainable:

1. Diversify Revenue Streams
2. Form Community Partnerships
3. Capitalize on Physical and Online Visibility
4. Implement Opportunities for Visitors to make Personal Connections

Recommendation 1: Diversify Revenue Streams

Through our document and interview analysis, we discovered that having only one source of funding is not financially sustainable, so we recommend museums diversify their income streams. Below are common methods we found that museums currently use to generate income:

- Museums that have an entry fee earn revenue through ticket sales and have a consistent and reliable source of funding. Private museums that are free to enter, such as the Fabrics and Stories Museum, tend to struggle with financial self-sustainability. Although ticket sales face seasonal fluctuation, it has potential to generate a significant amount of a museum's income.
- Museums that provide and incorporate a gift shop contribute to the museum experience. Strategically place gift shops at an entrance or exit combined with meaningful souvenirs can increase sales and generate revenue, as is the case with Făgăraș County Museum, Alma Vii, and the Fabrics and Stories Museum
- Romanian museums should not rely solely on grants because they are inconsistent revenue streams, applications are time consuming, and there are few grant opportunities in Romania. While it can be an important source of revenue, museums should carefully consider the return on investment for grants and weigh it against other, more dependable options.
- Museums should rent their venues for additional income. As seen in Table 4.2, we found three of the ten museums rent museum spaces for private events like shows, concerts, and weddings. This allows museums to generate extra income with little effort because the events are planned by outside parties.

Recommendation 2: Form Community Partnerships

An indirect financial strategy in which museums forge partnerships with local businesses has the potential to increase credibility and reduce costs. Museums should identify which businesses to partner with by looking for popular restaurants or businesses that interact directly with museum audiences. To build these relationships, museum staff should visit chosen businesses in person or approach them at events, if possible, asking to collaborate. Collaborations include sponsoring or co-hosting events or asking businesses to promote the museum to their customers. Refer to Appendix F for examples. Museums should also network with other museums to build relationships and create opportunities for non-monetary donations. Museum staff should visit other museums' events to learn what other strategies are being used to host events, allowing them to gain new perspective.

Recommendation 3: Capitalize on Physical and Online Visibility

Physical visibility is important to attract potential visitors, and therefore indirectly contributes to revenue. We recommend museums have large, distinctive, and easily seen signage on their exterior to establish its existence for passersby. Museum staff need to capitalize on their location by putting up signs that advertise the museums around popular attractions in the area. Museums should appear open during operating hours, such as having open gates when possible and clearly posted hours near the entrance. Greater online visibility, including utilizing social media and a website, will help a museum build awareness in the community while reducing marketing costs. From our interviews we learned websites are most effective when they can be

read in multiple languages, are easy to read, and have clear marked sections (e.g. About Us, Contact, Store, Donate, Exhibits). An effective website will help build credibility and make potential visitors more likely to visit and to donate to the museum.

Recommendation 4: Implement Opportunities for Visitors to make Personal Connections

Museums should allow visitors to contribute to exhibits and incorporate interactive components into the museum experience. Experiences like these make people passionate about the museum, inspiring them to donate, and encouraging visitors to come back to the museum for different events, increasing ticket sale revenue. Interactive exhibits can include physical components such as a scavenger hunt or quiz that encourages visitors to pay greater attention to the exhibits, handed out at the beginning of the museum with a small incentive (e.g. free gift shop item). Interactive exhibits could also have digital components such as videos and interactive maps. The museum can also create larger-scale art or research projects and find ways to have the visitors contribute if possible. One way to do this is by inviting visitors to embroider pieces of cloth that can then be joined together to make a whole exhibit. Examples of interactive components and visitor-made exhibits can be found in Appendix G.

6.0 Conclusion

Through this Interactive Qualifying Project, we learned about what practices museums use to remain financially sustainable and what effect they have on a community. We conducted interviews with museum administrators in the U.S. and Romania and museum experts to discuss their current financial sustainability practices and their interactions with their visitors and local community. Additionally, we observed museums in practice in Romania to help us fill in gaps of visitor experience that could not be obtained through interviews. Our research showed that it is vital to get more visitors to come to the museum through different methods such as holding events that reach a wider audience, bringing in younger people on the staff and to the museum, and capitalizing on their location. The data showed that an increase in visitation gave museums a greater chance of private or public funding, and increased revenue from ticket sales, gift shop sales, and donations.

By helping museums in economically suffering communities to be financially self-sustainable, these communities can reap the benefits of museums, including improving their local economy and strengthening community relations. Museum networking and collaboration across communities can allow for resources and strategies to be shared among different regions of Romania in the future. By creating stronger connections with the surrounding community, the stories of the museums can continue to live among the local communities, preserving local history and traditions for future generations to enjoy. Using our recommendations as a guide, MKBT can implement self-sustainability strategies when consulting future museums and share these findings with other museum professionals.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Statement for Interviewees

Interview Consent

We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Massachusetts, USA working with MKBT to develop strategies that will help small local museums and visitor centers in Romania become financially self-sustainable. We are conducting interviews to gain an understanding of the practices US/Romanian museums use to maintain financial sustainability. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question that we ask. This interview is confidential—no names or identifying information will appear in any project reports or publications unless you agree to have your name published.

With your permission, we will be recording this interview and using the recording for transcription purposes. With your permission, we may ask to quote you on our final report. This report will be published on our school website and can be accessed at any time later by the entire school and perhaps beyond, but we will ensure no direct names of you or your museum are used.

Should you have any questions or concerns upon completion of this interview, we can be reached at gr-makebetter-d23@wpi.edu. For more information about this research or about the rights of research participants, please contact Melissa Belz at mbelz@wpi.edu or contact Melissa Butler at mbutler@wpi.edu.

Do you consent to this interview?

Do you consent to having this interview recorded?

Do you consent to having your name published in the final report?

Appendix B: Interview Questions Version 1 for Museum Administrators Museum Employees for U.S and Romania

1. What is your role in the museum? How long have you been there?
2. What are some programs/events the museum has organized within the last year? Are there differences in the success and planning of programs and events compared to pre-Covid times (2019)?
 - a. What is the most successful event in terms of were the revenue and attendant goals met (did you make the money have the people attend that you expected or exceeded expectations)? Least successful?
 - b. How is the community involved in these events?
 - c. What is your favorite event or event you are most proud of?
3. How do you promote the museum and special events?
 - d. Online website, social media, signage around the community, signage outside the building, word of mouth, pamphlets in visitor centers
 - e. Which method is the most successful?
4. How many visitors on average do you get in a typical week? Were there any busy seasons/periods in the last year? How many then? Is it different post- vs pre-Covid?
5. What demographic does your museum typically attract?
 - a. How many repeat customers do you get? How do you keep track of this? Are visitor logs checked?
 - b. Where are customers coming from when they visit? Are they local? International?
 - c. What are the various ages (families vs seniors), size of groups
6. Who is the target demographic your museum wants to attract?
 - f. Is your museum successful in attracting this demographic?

Museum Operations

7. Who owns the museum? Who governs the building or organization?
8. In each of the following categories, what would you say the percentage of the total revenue is: Recurrent (ticket sales, subsidies: city, state), One time payments (grants, sponsorships, donations), Additional income (events, special exhibits, gift shop, cafes, rentals, memberships)
 - g. Is there another category of revenue not listed? If so, what is it and what percentage of total revenue is it?
 - h. **Follow up (US):** What do people pay for? Are there any lotteries, silent auctions, paid drinks? How exactly do they raise money at it? Which is most popular? What do they (the interviewee) think about that (why?)
 - i. Do the gift shops get a lot of business?
 - j. Are special exhibits successful in bringing more people in?
9. What kinds of local organizations do you work with for various programming, funding, event planning?
10. In each of the following categories what would you say the percentage of the total expenses are: Running costs (staff, maintenance, heating/cooling building, exhibit upkeep), Investment (?), Business development (discounts, promotion, marketing)
 - k. Is there another category of expense not listed? If so, what is it and what percentage of the total expenses is it?
11. How many employees have you had in the past year? How many volunteers if any?

12. What roles are held by the people on staff (financial experts, managers, exhibit knowledge, etc.)
 1. Is there someone on the staff designated for handling finances? Do they have the schooling or background for that position, or have they gained the skills through experience?

Additional Resources

13. Can you recommend anyone else that we might be able to speak with?
14. Can you recommend any resources that might help us in our research?

Appendix C: Interview Questions Version Two for Museum Administrators Museum Employees

1. What is your role in the museum? How long have you been there?
2. Who owns the museum? Who governs the building or organization?
3. Where are visitors coming from when they visit? Are they local? International?
 - a. What are the various ages (families vs seniors), size of groups
 - b. How many repeat customers do you get? How do you keep track of this? Are visitor logs checked?
4. Who is your target audience and are the marketing strategies for this group different?
 - c. If not trying to attract - why
5. Are there certain groups of people you have noticed are prevalent in the area but aren't coming to the museum? (Examples: religious groups, families with young children, age groups)
 - d. Do you feel certain groups feel left out/not included/less comfortable? - events and regular museums. If yes, have you done something about this?
6. What are some shared community interests? How does the museum connect to these?
7. What are some major events in the community? Do you host/take part in any major events that happen in the community?
8. How often have you partnered with local organizations? Why did you choose to partner up with them (aka in what context)? (restaurants/group/organizations/individuals)
9. How are you receiving feedback from the local community about what they want from the museum? If not, then why?

Museum Operations

10. What are your largest categories of revenue (subsidies: city, state; grants, sponsorships, donations, events, special exhibits, gift shop, cafes, rentals, tickets, museum membership)
11. What are your largest categories of expenses: (ex. staff, maintenance, heating/cooling building, exhibit upkeep, discounts, promotion, marketing)
12. How many employees have you had in the past year? How many volunteers? How did you find them?

Additional Resources

13. Can you recommend anyone else that we might be able to speak with?
14. Can you recommend any resources that might help us in our research?

Appendix D: Museum Expert Interview Questions

1. How do you make small/new history and cultural museums interactive?
2. What are the best marketing strategies for new museums to attract visitors?
3. What can small new museums do to get money considering rural places get zero government funding?
4. What are some programs that were unsuccessful in bringing people in?
5. What is the hardest part about bringing people with different viewpoints and backgrounds together?
6. What kind of programming can small museums implement to bring more people in, therefore making them financially self-sustainable.
7. How do you come up with ideas for interactive workshops and activities?
8. What types of events bring in young people?
9. How expensive is it for museums with no money to make these interactive opportunities?

Appendix E: Museum Observation Checklist

1. What are the ticket prices? Any discounts?
2. Is there somewhere to eat within the museum? Seating for that?
3. Is there a gift shop? Would you buy the things in it?
4. Is the space inviting?
5. Are there logbooks? When was the last entry? What languages can be identified? How big is the logbook?
6. Are the signs easy to read? What do the signs look like? Can they be seen easily or are they obscure? Are there English alternatives? (How foreign tourist-friendly is it?)

Appendix F: Table of Events

		Events	
US Museums	Metropolitan Waterworks Museum	Water fest: Free event where all ages come to learn about climate change and threats to water resources. It has about 30 booths run by 30 Volunteers.	Field Trips: Organized group of children from kindergarten to high school tour the museum. The cost is \$5 a child.
	NE Quilts Museum	Guest Speakers: Depending on what the exhibit is, museum staff bring a historian, or the artist and have them speak about the pieces on exhibit. They are hour long events.	
	Museum of Russian Icons	Mariachi Educational Workshop/Concert: An event that is mainly aimed at families and allows them to experience another culture	Outdoor Concert: Held in collaboration with the Parks and Rec. Dept.
Romanian Museums	MNAC	Artist Curator Meetings: The featured artists go online to talk about their exhibitions and all that is involved in them.	
	Făgăraș County Museum	Medieval Town Festival - A yearly festival hosted by the mayor both inside and outside the fortress. There are children's events from morning until noon, and at night there are events for adults (battle re-enactments, fire shows, army demonstrations, concerts)	Romanian Traditions Workshops - Schools come to the fortress and learn different and take part in different Romanian traditions. Recently, the fortress held an easter egg activity for children for Orthodox Easter.
	Șona	Auctions: The museum in the future will hold auctions for local artists' work.	
	Pitești Prison Memorial	Concerts: The rock concert took place in 2015 in a local theater. The band filmed a music video about political detention in Romania.	

	Museum of Abandonment	One-Night Event: Visitors built the exhibit. They invited people to sew the names of abandoned children onto pieces of clothing, and then these pieces were hung up together to create a wall. The other half of this exhibit was the launching of their application	
	Alma Vii	Brunch: Hosted by the museum, tourists can sit down to a brunch prepared by the local women.	
Museum Experts	Nina Simon	Race Through Time: Partnered with a local bike shop to put on a bike scavenger hunt. They asked bike shops to put up flyers in their shop and gave their approval of the event to gain credibility.	Radical Craft Night: This event included a hybrid of different crafts from quilting to taxidermy. The idea is to have cross pollination across different crafts to share ideas and techniques.
	Tejshvi Jain	Late night events: music and food that works with younger people, games, work with design or art institute so they also have things to do	Escape Rooms: They want to set up an escape room in extra spaces within the museum.

Appendix G: Examples for Recommendations about Visitor Engagement

Interactive Components:

- Interactive digital displays, where one can choose a short video to watch
- Worksheet that acts as a guide for someone to follow while moving through the museum. including a treasure hunt format, and when a visitor finds everything, they are left with a message or image.

Visitor-made Exhibit:

- A project done at a local mall involved making a giant fish sculpture out of metal. Instead of having the metal worker make hundreds of scales for the fish, he allowed visitors to make them under guidance instead, regardless of age (N. Simon, personal communication, 03/29/2023).

Workshops:

- Storytelling and embroidery workshop for students as part of their partnership with surrounding schools.
- Various workshops that include traditions typically seen in Romania. For example, in the Easter season they host an Easter egg painting activity for middle schoolers to teach them the tradition.

Appendix H: Deliverable

Strategies for Museums to Achieve Financial Self-Sustainability

This document was created by WPI students in collaboration with MKBT for the purpose of informing new museums of various methods of funding for the intent of reaching financial self-sustainability.

Because it is imperative that museums find multiple consistent sources of funding, this document will outline a number of methods to generate revenue and reduce costs. There is a wide range of largest funding sources that varies for each museum depending on their size, location, and regional community. Having only one source of funding is not feasible or recommended. To become more financially self-sustainable, museums should diversify their income streams.

Below are some of the most common methods that museums currently use to generate income:

- Grants
- Donations
- Ticket Sales
- Gift Shop Sales
- Venue Rentals
- Museum Memberships
- Partnerships with Local Businesses
- Special Tours
- Special Exhibits
- Public Events

Below are 4 major categories regarding museums, each with examples of ways they can make money or cut expenses.

Financial Strategies

Grants

In Romania, grant funding is very scarce, inconsistent, and applications are time consuming. However, the number of organizations in need of aid is high. Grant funding is an important income source but far less dependable than other sources. Grants should be lower in the list of priorities and can be considered if additional resources are needed.

Ticket sales

Consider an entry fee. Ticket sales are consistent and reliable and can contribute to a good part of a museum's income. Private museums that don't have an entrance fee tend to struggle with financial self-sustainability. Having special discounts on tickets for people of different ages can increase the chances of people visiting.

Gift Shop Sales

Gift shops can offer a form of supplemental income. This amount may not be very much, but strategically placing the gift shop near the museum exit for visitors to funnel

through and having a wide variety of souvenirs can greatly increase sales and generate revenue.

Venue rentals

Renting museum spaces for private events like shows, concerts, speakers, and weddings is a great method to generate extra revenue. Even though space rentals might make up only a small percentage of revenue, little effort is required as outside parties set up the venue, bring equipment, and run the event. Some ideas of rentals could be for weddings, photoshoots, plays, and concerts.

Community Engagement

An indirect method of reducing costs is investing in community engagement. Museums that make connections within their community reduce costs by sharing resources and networking with businesses.

Partnerships

The museum should form partnerships with local businesses to increase credibility and reduce costs through co-hosting events. Museums should identify which businesses to partner with by looking for popular restaurants or businesses that interact directly with museum audiences.

Networking

Museums must network and promote each other to build relationships and create opportunities for support such as sharing resources, reducing expenses. Such resources include technology, venue space, ideas for events and exhibits. An example of collaboration is a reciprocal agreement with

another museum, so that buying one ticket allows entry into both museums. To increase both museums' visibility, share promotional materials and post information about upcoming joint events.

Community Events

Free community events bring in a diverse set of people who may not have visited the museum otherwise. Events should inform the community of the museum's presence, encourage repeat visitors, and be run by volunteers to cut costs.

Examples of events:

- Music performances - Concerts and performances featuring local musicians.
- Food and drink events - Events like wine tastings or cocktail parties, that feature exhibits or themes related to the museum's themes.
- Museum sleepovers - Overnight stay for visitors, allowing them to explore the exhibits after hours and participate in special activities like flashlight tours and arts and crafts workshops.
- Escape rooms - Escape rooms based on their exhibits or themes, where visitors must solve puzzles and clues to escape before time runs out.

School Partnerships

Many museums work with schools to set up educational tours. This will inspire the students to come back outside of school with their families, bringing in additional ticket sales. When young kids visit, they will often buy souvenirs from the gift shop, leading to increased revenue. Other ways to engage students could be to plan activities in which the children create something or to have informative demonstrations.

Interns

Recruiting interns from local high schools or universities can bring new and diverse perspectives to the museum that can help connect with a wider audience. Interns can lead tours, manage social media, and help museums better connect with the local community through innovative event ideas. This creates a win-win situation, as museums get cost efficient labor while interns get real world experience.

Visibility

We recommend museums make themselves visible and accessible both physically and online. An online and physical presence not only brings increased visitor numbers, but provides museums with strategies for free marketing, reducing museum costs.

Effective Signage

Museum signage should be easily visible so visitors can tell immediately that they are in the right place. Signage in popular destinations for tourists or residents in the local area can increase the chances of people visiting.

Website

A website allows visitors to contact the museum, easily locate it, and learn more about the museum's history and backstory. A clean website that is easy to navigate will lend credibility to the museum as a legitimate establishment. Consider having the option of multiple languages to reach an international audience.

Inexpensive and beginner-friendly website creation software:

- Wix - local businesses
- GoDaddy - online store

- Site123 - quick and easy website setup
- Ucraft - using your own domain
- Weebly - free online stores used with square software

Social Media

Social media is a useful, inexpensive tool for museums to promote themselves and their events to large audiences. Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are user friendly and allow museum staff to portray their content on different platforms for various audiences. YouTube is effective for virtual exhibits, Facebook appeals to general audiences in Romania, and Instagram appeals to younger audiences.

Google Maps

To be easily found online, museums should add themselves to Google Maps and keep their business information up to date on the site. Through Google Maps, a potential visitor can quickly find out general museum information, including visitor reviews, operational hours, museum contacts, and website information.

Online Museum Components

Museum administrators should implement online components to their museum that can be easily accessed through their website. Online museum components can include videos or research projects where visitors can categorize museum exhibits and artifacts as an interactive game, simultaneously helping museum researchers organize their findings and becoming more involved with the museum. Online museum exhibits can pique the interest of visitors which may encourage them to visit the in-

person exhibits for the full experience. They may also be drawn to the museum store or to donate to the museum on the website after their virtual visit.

Visitor Engagement

To engage visitors in a way that will encourage them to come back, incorporate interactive components into the museum experience. When people make a personal connection, they are likely to take that experience with them and return in the future.

Interactive Components

Interactive components make a museum more engaging for visitors. They include digital components such as video selection and interactive maps, or physical components such as a scavenger hunt that acts as a guide to follow through the museum exhibits, pointing out specific facts or features that would not be easily noticed.

Visitor-Made Exhibits

These exhibits should include an emotional component that allows visitors to have a personal connection with the museum. Experiences like these make people passionate about the museum, more inclined to donate, and encourage visitors to come back to the museum for different events. Museums can set up workstations for visitors to replicate contents of the museums. One example of a way to do this includes inviting visitors to embroider pieces of cloth that can be joined together to make a whole exhibit.

Workshops

Workshops are another interactive component recommended for implementation. Workshops should include an engaging activity that relates to the museum. The artwork created from workshops can then be used as a temporary exhibit in the museum. Examples include holding a children's workshop for making crafts with a specific relevant topic, and a workshop where visitors create a piece of a sculpture with the help of a blacksmith.