


## Closing the Gap between Museums and Schools

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### Abstract

Museums' roles are diversifying considering their dynamic relationships with the present-day economy, society, and communities. Nevertheless, education is the main constant marketing museums' complex activities. An important part of the educational mission of museums is designed with and for teachers and their students. Nevertheless, these partnerships are complex and they need more understanding for designing more effective educational programs. Having this in mind, the present study analyzes the way primary-school teachers in Bucharest, Romania, interact with museums and how they use their collections as educational resources in class. The qualitative investigation implemented shows that there is a high potential for partnership and teachers need more guidance and cooperation opportunities coming from museum educators and curators.

### Keywords

Museum education; museum-school partnerships; museum stakeholders; museum outreach programs.

### Introduction

Museums are changing fast, in many ways, both considering how they relate to their collections, as well as to their public. There are three classic perspectives on museums: educational museums, aesthetic museums, and socially responsible museums (Hein, 2006, pp. 342-345). Although sometimes these three approaches are considered parallel to each other, at a closer look, the educational dimension is centrally present in all cases. Even more, museum education is a complex process addressing various audiences (Taylor & Neill, 2008), designed and implemented by specialized staff.

The "new museology" is the result of a shift from the curated heritage towards heritage interpreted by visitors (Rodney, 2019, p. 40). The perspective has changed significantly, and the roles of museums have diversified, nonetheless preserving a central one: education. This happens even if visitors do not directly aim to improve themselves but are looking to be entertained while visiting a museum. Smith (2014) argues that the "museum effect" determines that visitors exiting a museum are improved versions of themselves. The interaction with museum heritage makes us better in various ways, not only considering the increased knowledge we might possess. This process is enhanced if the purpose of the visits or the interaction with the museum heritage is educational, as is the case of school-museum encounters. The two organizations, the museum, and the school are natural partners, considering their educational missions, while "the learning potential of the museum-school partnerships is related to the levels of satisfaction that can create shared learning experiences and opportunities, generating emotions in

### How to cite

Zbucea, A., Ivan, L., Timofte, M.-S., & Iordan, I. (2022). Closing the Gap between Museums and Schools. *Culture. Society. Economy. Politics*, 2(2), 11-25. <https://doi.org/10.2478/csep-2022-0008>  
ISSN (online) 2810-2010

<https://website.sciendo.com/publication/culture-society-economy-politics/>

<http://www.facultateademangement.ro/culture-sep/>

students through experiences that stimulate interest in learning through artistic experimentation” (Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, & Atenas, 2021, p. 7). Even more, Gómez-Hurtado, Cuenca-López, and Borghi (2020, p. 14) observe that “the importance of heritage education in school is an unavoidable fact in this society where it is necessary to train people in critical citizenship who can withstand today’s changes”.

The educational value of the interaction of schools with museum heritage is enhanced by proper planning and organizing. There are many ways in which schools and museums can cooperate. It has been a decades-long shift from a passive educative environment offered by museums to an environment focused on the philosophy of “teaching with things”, which is based on interacting with heritage for the best interest of the public (Lubar, 2017, pp. 283-301).

The encounter of school students with heritage can lead to an enriching experience if attentively planned, if teachers and museum representatives cooperated well and optimally designed the “class”, and if they effectively considered the multitude of options available for a successful class based on museum heritage. Practice, at least in Romania, shows a narrow range of interactions between schools and museums, although school groups are relatively common in large museums. This might be linked to many aspects, such as the limited cooperation between museums and schools, the insufficient diversity of educational resources offered by museums, or by the lack of awareness related to the multitude of heritage-based educational options.

Having this in mind, we aimed to investigate how teachers, especially primary-school ones, interacted with museums as educational resources. Therefore, we organized a series of focus groups to better understand their approaches and perspectives on this subject. Teacher-led research can clarify ways to overcome potential difficulties and bring primary school students closer to museums, using teachers as links and key actors in the process.

We aimed to identify the expectations and ways of interacting with the museum of those who had recent experiences (within the last 5 years) of student learning activities involving the museum (e.g., visits to museums, referencing exhibits in classroom activities, having museum representatives as guests in school, etc.), compared to teachers who did not have such experiences recently or did not have them at all. We also aimed to identify the real difficulties of integrating the museum into the classroom or extracurricular learning activities, the motivations of those who initiated such activities, and the perceived benefits. The results of the investigation might contribute to facilitating teachers' access to museum resources and might stimulate the cultural participation of primary school students, especially those from disadvantaged families (with limited access to culture, at risk of poverty and social exclusion).

### **Museum heritage in schools**

Learning is at the heart of any museum activity, being of central concern when designing the museum's offer. In most cases, learning processes associated with museum collections inside the exhibition halls are considered, but equal attention should be given to learning outside of the museum, in other spaces such as classrooms. Dynamic museums may offer learning opportunities to students in their schools, in cooperation with their teachers. This approach is effective especially when backed by adequate policies and plans, which could also strategically include partners to enhance learning (Ambrose & Paine, 2018, p. 70).

From an operative perspective, to plan visits to schools (outreach activities), museums should consider several steps (Ambrose & Paine, 2018, pp. 70-74). First, museums should contact schools/teachers and inform them of the full range of educational options they have. Setting up partnerships and tight cooperation could greatly influence the effectiveness of the educational projects developed (Gómez-Hurtado, Cuenca-López, & Borghi, 2020). Considering not only students when planning outreach programs and activities, but also training sessions for teachers would be recommended for enhanced effectiveness. Since teachers have different interests and they generate various types of dynamics and exchanges during these training programs, these sessions should be carefully planned and organized (Grenier, 2010). We also stress that there is an expectation from teachers to be contacted and guided by museums, to benefit from good communication and relevant approaches (Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, & Atenas, 2021, p. 12).

Cooperation between the two organizations is key to designing a proper and effective approach. Still, it is not an easy process, since “when co-designing educational journeys, museums must understand the socioeconomic context and needs of schools, and schools must understand the limitations that museums have to establish fair, collaborative programs” (Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, & Atenas, 2021, p. 7).

The next step consists of developing learning materials, delivered both offline and online, which could be quite diverse in form and content, from simplified catalogs and booklets to worksheets. Subsequently, the visit or program should be planned by museums together with the schools. After the joint activity, a follow-up should be considered.

The joint activities could be developed on-site – in the learning room and/or as a museum visit – or outside museums. Some of the approaches that might be considered are talks and demonstrations in classrooms; clubs and holiday activities in schools, parks, libraries, or other locations; school loans; mobile classrooms; other events in public spaces.

The object-based lesson is not a new concept; this approach has been considered since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lubar, 2017, p. 290). The unique artifacts museums collect and display can educate, develop critical thinking, and stimulate imagination and creativity in various ways, involving all senses (Lubar, 2017, p. 291). In most cases museum displays are activated inside museums, thus turning galleries into classrooms (Lubar, 2017, pp. 293-301), but they could be also used in schools or other spaces for a wider audience. Starting from a heritage object, many lessons can be learned, from the characteristics of the heritage considered, to historical aspects associated with that heritage and its creator(s), to concerns of contemporary society, and many other aspects. Thus, bearing in mind targeted audiences, interdisciplinary approaches can be considered and operationalized at various levels. This might lead to increased knowledge but also to the development of hard and soft skills among visitors and, in particular, among school students. In these contexts, the museum educator/ museum representative is both a teacher and a facilitator. Active participation of the audience can enhance the educational outcomes, as well as the level of satisfaction and entertainment associated with the museum-related program/museum visit.

When designing learning programs in museums or schools, in association with museum heritage, we can consider one of the learning styles presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Learning styles**

Learning style	Mechanism	Operationalization
Behaviorist	learning from practice and experience	Heritage/ exhibition/ artifact is the stimulus

Cognitive-developmental	learning takes place in the context of active exchanges with the environment	interactive insertion in museums/ interactive mobile kits
Discovery learning	there are three modes of representing the world – the enactive, the iconic, the symbolic	exhibitions are designed to encourage discovery
Multiple intelligences	9 types of intelligences jointly contribute to learning: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematic, visual/spatial, tactile/physical, interpersonal, intuitive, creative	museums should use as many techniques as possible both inside the exhibitions halls and in classrooms or other unconventional spaces
Social cognition	society is the “teacher”	museums are designed/ considered as social settings
Constructivism	people construct knowledge and create meaning	exhibitions should permit visitors to create their own world

Adapted and developed from Ambrose and Pain (2018, pp. 67-75).

When designing the educational museum program, no matter if developed inside a museum or a school, it is important to also set the right outcomes and consider their appropriate characteristics. Hooper-Greenhill (2010, pp. 53-57) identifies five main categories of learning outcomes: knowledge and understanding; intellectual, practical, and/or professional skills; attitudes and values; enjoyment, inspiration, and creativity; activity, behavior, and progression.

These outcomes are facilitated by a wide range of approaches, presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Museum-related educational tools**

<b>On-site tools (in museums)</b>	<b>Online tools (offered by museums online)</b>	<b>In school tools (used in schools)</b>
Guided tours and talks Interactive displays Educational programs and workshops Hands-on exhibits Demonstrations Experiments Clubs Training programs*	Catalogs Learning resources Pedagogical kits Worksheets Educational films Tutorials Interactive virtual learning programs Digital guided tours Virtual field trips Object databases Web-based projects Advice for museum visits /museum-related educational activities*	Lectures Demonstrations Experiments Clubs School loans Pedagogical kits Worksheets Mobile classrooms Touch-on exhibits/ replicas of museum heritage

\*designed for teachers

Generally, we think of museum educational encounters taking a physical form, mostly in the halls of the museum. When considering online options, we see various museum platforms as channels for educational materials or as infrastructure for transferring educational content. Nevertheless, digital technologies can facilitate access to more types of educational approaches, such as a wide range of interactive virtual learning programs (Gaylord-Opalewski, & O’Leary, 2019). These programs enhance the museum experience of school students and facilitate direct and live contact with a museum’s heritage and its specialists, not only its educators. AI offers additional opportunities for museums to find new, entertaining, and engaging ways to reach their school audiences (and not only them) (see some general consideration related to the adoption of AI in museums in

Charr, 2020, 2021; Duguleană et al., 2020; Murphy & Villaespesa, 2020; Vidu, Zbucea, & Pinzaru, 2021; and specific approaches related to museum education in Aslan, 2021).

The impact of an educational program based on museum heritage should be evaluated at the end of the program and/or several weeks after the program's completion. This allows for accurate observation and understanding of the results and the durable effects related to participation in that program. Measuring learning, especially in an informal context, is not an easy task and appropriate tools should be considered (Diamond, Horn, & Uttal, 2016, pp. 17-33). Some of the methods recommended are related to measuring knowledge retention by recall or recognition, measuring implicit memory, assessing conceptual change related to educational exposure, etc. Both qualitative and quantitative tools can be considered, the most common being observation, interviews, and questionnaires (see for operational guidelines Zbucea & Ivan, 2008; Diamond, Horn, & Uttal, 2016, pp. 53-84).

### **Methodology**

The present research was designed as part of the „But why bring the museum to school” project, which continues the professional development activity of the Da’DeCe Association in the field of museum education in Romania. Over its twelve years of activity, the Association has progressively shifted from activities aimed directly at the public to creating resources for education and culture professionals interested to use the museum as a source of inspiration for educational activities. The concern for research has emerged as an integral part of the projects developed by the Association as a result of the educators’ need to improve their activity and to connect with other practitioners, especially those in the field of education and art, but most importantly out of a desire to create mechanisms that facilitate a complex understanding of young audiences, which are in a constant state of flux. Depending on the nature of the projects, previous studies were conducted in multi-disciplinary teams made up of sociologists, independent researchers or researchers from the Institute of Education Sciences, museum educators, artists, and teachers. For the „But why bring the museum to school” project, the Association is working for the first time with an organization focused on teacher training, the Didactic Corp House of Bucharest. Therefore, a more complex study, which takes into consideration first and foremost the teachers’ needs concerning museums is not only welcomed but necessary as it lays a stronger foundation for the collaboration between the museum educators of the Association and teachers.

Thus, the research examined how teachers use the museum as a didactic resource, aiming to identify ways to optimize the use of heritage in developing general and subject-specific competencies at the primary school level. The objectives of the research carried out among primary school teachers are presented below, with the mention that we carried out two focus groups: one with teachers who declared (before the research) that they had no recent experiences with the museum (in the form of visits, presentations of exhibits, virtual tours, etc.) and the other focus group with teachers who had at least one such experience in the last 5 years. We must emphasize that in the past few years visiting museums was not an easy endeavor because of the specific conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the tight administrative procedures teachers had to follow to go out of school with their students even before the pandemic.

### **Research objectives**

The purpose of this research was to understand teachers' perceptions of museums and museum heritage as teaching resources, specifically targeting the school environment that has limited access to cultural resources in general. Thus, we selected teachers from

Bucharest and Ilfov County schools where there were more students from families at risk of marginalization and social exclusion.

*RO1: Understanding teachers' perception of museums and museum heritage as a teaching resource;*

*RO2: Understanding how teachers integrate the museum/collections/heritage objects as a means of instruction in the teaching strategies addressed;*

*RO3: Identifying the didactic educational resources that museums can offer (in the opinion of the teaching staff) and what kind of collaborations they expect with museums, that would be useful for the educational process.*

### **Focus groups**

The two focus groups were conducted on 22.10.2022, between 14:00-16:00 (the one that involved interviewing teachers with recent museum experiences) and 16:30-18:30 respectively (the one in which we interviewed teaching staff with no recent teaching experience with museums). For simplicity, we will refer to the first group of interviewees as experienced and the second as inexperienced when presenting the research findings. The same interview guide was considered for both focus groups. The interview guides mainly addressed the way classes were held in schools and how museum collections were eventually integrated into the discourse and the activities, as well as how teachers perceived museums as educational resources.

The focus groups took place online, using the ZOOM platform, and were recorded with prior consent from the participants. The approximate duration of each focus group was two hours. In the end, all participants had to complete the background questionnaire which was used to collect the socio-demographic data - necessary to contextualize the results.

The participants, in-service primary school teachers from Bucharest and Ilfov County, were invited to take part in one of the two group discussions, after being questioned about their experiences with museums in the teaching-learning process, over the last 5 years. When recruiting the participants, the following were specified: the topic of the discussion, details about the project, the approximate duration of the discussion, and the fact that it would be a recorded discussion part of the activities in the project. The invitation addressed to the teachers included details regarding the preservation of the participants' anonymity as well as the confidentiality of the data they would provide. The participants gave their consent regarding the scientific processing of the data, including personal data (e.g., the email address, necessary for contacting the participants in the research).

### **Findings and discussions**

#### **Participants**

Table 3 presents the main details for the two participant groups, using codes instead of names or email addresses, to preserve anonymity. All 19 participants were women.

**Table 3. Participant group**

<b>Code</b>	<b>School's Socio-Educational Risk Index* (low &lt; 3, middle - between 3 and 7, high &gt; 7)</b>	<b>Number of years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Age, in completed years</b>
P1.1	Low	16	48
P1.2	Low	22	41
P1.3	Low	24	44
P1.4	Low	5	44
P 1.5	Low	16	43

P1.6	Low	25	55
P 1.7	Medium	36	55
P 1.8	Medium	47	67
P1.9	Low	39	57
P.1.10	Low	3	29
P2.1	Medium	1	45
P2.2	Medium	32	50
P 2.3	Medium	25	55
P 2.4	Low	33	52
P 2.5	Low	32	53
P 2.6	Low	38	57
P 2.7	Low	11	41
P 2.8	Low	38	56
P2.9	Low	29	48

\* According to Marin, Busega, Iosifescu, & Postoiu (2020).

Source: authors' elaboration

All the participants were primary school teachers, 7 of them from schools in Ilfov County (nearby Bucharest) and 12 of them from schools in Bucharest. Except for three teachers, who had little teaching experience (5 years, 3 years, and 1 year, respectively), we interviewed senior teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience in primary education, more than half of the interviewed people have worked for over 20 years in primary education.

This distribution of participants in the group is typical for the situation of primary education in Romania (especially in large, urban areas): primary school teachers who are approaching the retirement age or have more than 20 years of teaching experience represent over 50% of primary school teaching staff (Ministry of Education, 2021). It is worth mentioning that the issue of the aging teaching workforce in pre-university education in Romania is not publicly discussed as frequently as it should be. We are also talking about a profession that is especially embraced by women (over 85% in the primary cycle - Eurostat, 2016), a distinctive aspect of pre-university education in Europe.

### ***Perception of museums as a teaching resource***

Participants (from both groups) were asked to describe what a typical lesson looked like in their classrooms and when was the last time they had used the museum (including the museum visit) as an educational resource. Both experienced and inexperienced participants had to mention past experiences of using the museum as an educational resource. The discussions highlighted some differences between the perceptions of the experienced group compared to the inexperienced one.

Museums are mostly perceived as a teaching resource in connection to school visits, not so much in school. Nonetheless, participants, especially those in the experienced group, mentioned using videos (often from YouTube) in which a museum or collection is sporadically presented. In such situations, teachers feel the need for a specialist; they realize that many such videos contain erroneous, partial, or even false information. It was indicated that museums should have on their websites not necessarily the possibility of virtual tours (which can be tiring for the primary school student and complex in terms of information), but small video materials (10-15 min) in which a collection, an exhibit, or a short video lesson is presented, at the level of understanding of a 6-10-year-old child and with the guarantee that the provided information has been validated by an expert.

Overall, the teachers described a passive relationship with the museum: either the museum initiated contact and suggested certain workshops and this information reached the teacher most often by chance, or the teacher organized (with the support of

the parents) a visit to the museum but, during the visit (including after the visit), they did not reference or create connections with the lessons taught in the classroom or with the school curriculum. In some cases, the visit to the museum was decided by a marketing offer (e.g., for the “Școala Altfel” week<sup>1</sup>) – the role of the teacher being passive again. The teachers’ expectations are related to a passive relationship in which the museum takes over an educational activity, assumes responsibility, and completely directs it. In this relationship imagined and expected by the teacher, the museum becomes a means to step away from the routine, change the pace, and relieve the teacher of their teaching responsibilities even if it is for a short period. Or, such a partnership, in which one of the actors is passive, cannot be lasting, nor does it significantly contribute to the learning process.

Participants emphasized that in many schools “there is no culture of going to the museum” and that the reluctance to organize events outside of school had increased with the pandemic and with the changes in regulations that restricted how a teacher could integrate out-of-school activities into the curriculum he was required to follow in class. Here the teachers pointed to the recent changes in the regulation which stipulated that out-of-school activities (including visits to the museum) could no longer be done during school hours. This change has contributed to a decrease in the motivation of the teaching staff regarding the organization of activities that include museum visits. These should take place after school or on weekends, which is difficult to arrange.

### ***Using the museum and museum heritage as a learning resource***

Discussions revealed that the only way in which the teachers from the two analyzed groups saw the collaboration with museums as being possible was by visiting them. The instances they described as situations in which they used the museum as an educational resource were those in which they had organized different visits to museums (on their initiative or at the invitation of the museums). In this context, the socioeconomic status of students was considered an important factor. Teachers from schools/classes where there are fewer families (of students) with economic and social problems indicated more frequently the visit to the museum as a possibility to continue or complement certain lessons taught in class. The segregation between “classes where a visit to the museum can be proposed” and “classes where a visit to the museum cannot be proposed” (the receptivity of parents to such proposals being different) was evident from the discussion.

Another element mentioned by some of the teachers, especially those described here as having experience with the use of museums as educational resources, was the participation in workshops within museums - organized and initiated by museums. In these situations, the participants clearly highlighted the discrepancy between students who could afford to attend such workshops and those who did not have such possibilities. In this case, sporadic and entirely contextual situations were mentioned, where teachers alongside some of the students in their class had been able to participate in such workshops. Continuing participation in such activities had been difficult due to the insufficient financial resources of many of the students or the impossibility to accommodate the whole class of students in the workshop.

Additional opportunities are also important in determining teachers to organize school visits. Most often, museum visits take place during the “Școala Altfel” week, for which the methodology (Ministry of Education, 2016) stipulates the possibility of taking day trips,

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<sup>1</sup> Translated as “School done differently” or “A different kind of school”, “Școala Altfel” is a national program whose aim is to contribute to the development of learning competencies and socio-emotional skills among K-12 students through non-formal educational activities such as visits to museums and exhibitions, nature tours, sport activities, STEAM activities, day trips to heritage sites, etc. The program is organized once during a school year and has a duration of 5 consecutive days.

participating in out-of-school workshops, visiting museums, etc. In these situations, the choice of route, sites to visit, or workshops to attend is not necessarily made within the didactic framework, based on the national curriculum and the subject-specific competencies. It is, rather, a matter of a specialized and well-marketed offer of products and services developed by private companies/initiatives that provide schools/ classes with packages structured around the arbitrary route and heritage sites/museums that are "suitable" considering their prices and accessibility. Consequently, these offers are stereotypical; they lack variety and they follow the same "successful" routes year after year, at least from the point of view of marketing.

During the focus-group discussions, several museums were mentioned. The "Nicolae Simache" Clock Museum in Ploiești was given as an example of a successful trip. The House of Experiments was mentioned as a place that attracts students through its subject matter and approach, but with prohibitive costs for those who come from families with modest incomes. From the museums in Bucharest, the large ones were mentioned: the National Museum of History of Romania, the National Museum of Art of Romania, the "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum, and the "King Ferdinand I" National Military Museum. These museums seem to be preferred by participants for several reasons: they directly relate to some school subjects (e.g., history, visual arts); they are part of the visitor experience of the teaching staff (they visited them in the past); they are more present in the public discourse (including in the media discourse); they are centrally located in Bucharest. Therefore, the range of visited museums is limited and it reveals, on the one hand, that teaching staff has poor knowledge of the museum heritage in Bucharest and its surroundings, and, on the other hand, the poor visibility of some museums within the school system.

### ***Difficulties and opportunities in using the museum as an educational resource***

The interviewed teachers discussed intensively the difficulties they perceived or experienced when they tried to organize visits to a museum or participate with their students in workshops offered by museums. Both groups of teachers mentioned only these two manners in which the museum could be used as an educational resource: visiting museums and participating in workshops within museums. We will proceed to analyze separately the perceived difficulties and opportunities for these two modalities of using the museum, as they emerged from the research data.

#### Museum visits

Visiting museums was mentioned by both experienced and inexperienced teachers as a way to integrate the museum into the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, difficulties are associated with such trips. These obstacles are mainly related to organizing the visit and getting to the museums, but some of them are related to the time spent in museums.

The first obstacle a teacher must overcome is associated with excessive bureaucracy, i.e., the thick file (containing numerous documents, agreements, and signatures) needed for each student in the group. This procedure reduces the teachers' motivation to organize a visit to the museum. Moreover, many teachers sense a lack of support from the school management and parent committees. This aspect is more visible in the case of schools that have many students coming from families at risk of marginalization or economic and social exclusion.

After complying with the formal requirements to leave the school, teachers face difficulties in securing transport. This aspect determines the choice of museums to be visited based on the criteria of proximity and/or public transport accessibility. The problem is more pressing with Ilfov County schools and schools in Bucharest that are not centrally located or that have difficulties reaching the city center (where most of the museums are located).

Furthermore, for some teachers, the challenges do not stop at the museum entrance. The content presented during the visits/tour was seen by some of the teachers as challenging or unattractive for primary school students. This could be related to insufficient or lack of communication between the museum educator/museum representatives and the teacher with regard to adapting the content to a specific group of children (i.e., cognitive ability, interests, learning needs, etc.) or a school subject-specific topic.

### Museum workshops

Most participants emphasized, on the one hand, that students are more receptive to workshops organized in museums than classic museum visits (e.g., guided tours) and, on the other hand, that primary school children are more interested in interactive content and experiential and multi-sensory learning (in which their senses are stimulated). These aspects seem to not be communicated to the museum staff (i.e., museum educators, tour guides, etc.) either before the visit or afterward; they remain unspoken dissatisfactions and, thus, become inhibiting factors for subsequent visits.

Alongside the classic museum visits, the teaching staff appreciated the free or financially accessible programs that allowed them to enroll some of their students in workshops organized by the museums, i.e., thematic, interactive workshops structured on modules and taking place over a longer period (from a few days to a few weeks). Participants mentioned that the information about such workshops was obtained on a case-by-case basis, mostly by chance or from information provided by a parent/acquaintance.

Similar to museum visits, costs are also an obstacle. For classes with many students, who come from families with modest incomes, such workshops are cost-prohibitive. The interviewed teachers supported the idea of discounts or vouchers for such workshops, which could be of help to students with fewer cultural and financial resources. These vouchers could enable students to go to the museum several times a year, which, in turn, could encourage them to use museums as educational resources. Other suggestions included discounts for students (especially for those from disadvantaged families), free workshops organized by museums, and a closer monitoring of the situation of those who cannot benefit from cultural resources in general because they cannot afford them financially.

Transportation is another pressing issue when attending workshops in museums, especially if it requires traveling after school hours, according to a fixed schedule. Moreover, visiting heritage sites or museums out of town entails high costs that are difficult to be covered by families.

Another logistical barrier is associated with the number of students that can attend certain museum workshops. Sometimes it is impossible to enroll an entire class in a single workshop as classes have on average 24-25 students and those workshops accommodate only half the number. It might be difficult to organize students into smaller groups to enable everyone to participate in the same workshop, there might not be enough museum educators to lead several workshops at the same time or there might not be enough room in the museum for such large groups. Therefore, such situations generate additional organizational difficulties that teachers are subjected to.

Many of the participants mentioned the lack of motivation to carry out activities with students such as museum visits, out-of-school workshops, etc. The lack of motivation is fueled by the absence of an organizational culture within the school system that values teachers who have such initiatives, by the lack of examples (best practices) from fellow teachers, and by the cumbersome procedures that accompany all additional activities with students, especially when they are carried outside the school grounds.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The investigated teachers highlighted the lack of resources and the limited availability of parents to contribute to activities that involved museum visits/workshops. Since the group investigated here was chosen from the teachers whose classes also included students from families at risk of poverty and social exclusion, we can deduce that the lack of resources of these families and, by extension, in the respective classes/schools, is an important barrier. Nevertheless, in many museums, entrance costs or even workshop fees are quite low, while public transportation is free for all school children. Therefore, we can conclude that either teachers are not very aware of the actual costs involved in visiting a museum, or they are not motivated enough to overcome the challenges they perceive.

Generally, we observe a low level of awareness among teachers of how museums can be used as educational resources, outside of the actual visits and participation in the workshops organized within the museums. This is in line with the findings of previous studies, developed at the national level (Zbucea & Ivan, 2021). Therefore, museums should be more active both in presenting alternatives and offering concrete educational resources to be used either in museums or in schools. Museums should also consider regularly advertising to schools their offer of museum visits and workshops. The offer should take into account that these activities must take place outside of scheduled school hours, usually in the afternoon (in most cases primary school hours are organized in the morning until midday), as well as the possibility of making transportation arrangements for the invited classes or the possibility of carrying out these activities directly in schools or in a place that is closer to the school (e.g., the local public library).

The “Școala Altfel” week remains an opportunity for museums to integrate their educational offer into the program of excursions, workshops, and visits that different private companies/ initiatives present to schools. Of course, this means that museums should organize themselves following the strict logic of the free-market economy. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for museums to develop long-term partnerships with the companies that offer educational packages to schools for the “Școala Altfel” week. Museums could also offer a direct alternative to private offers, by building a special offer for educational services, at lower, more accessible prices for families that cannot afford to turn to the already successful offers in the market.

Additionally, museums could develop digital educational resources. Many museums already use new technologies to promote and make their heritage more accessible to the public and virtual tours have become quite frequent. However, primary school teachers feel the need for educational resources more adapted to the age and the cognitive ability of their students: 10–15-minute videos that present a single aspect (e.g., a collection, an exhibit, a historical event, etc.), which teachers could use directly in class while having the guarantee of the accuracy of the information. The attractiveness of these materials, their accessibility on the museum website, and their direct distribution in schools could ensure a sustainable partnership between museums and teachers as part of the teaching and learning process in primary schools.

Museums could purchase minibusses to facilitate the access of student groups who have difficulties reaching the museum due to transportation and financial challenges. Moreover, this solution was also suggested by teachers to address mobility and accessibility issues related to planning visits to museums and attending workshops organized by museums. An alternative solution would see museums develop partnerships with transport companies with costs reflected in the museums’ admissions fees. But this would partially solve the transportation issues as students who cannot afford the fees or those from economically disadvantaged families would still face financial challenges.

The teaching staff described a passive relationship with museums, in which they expected the museum representatives (i.e. museum educators, museum specialists, etc.) to entirely conduct a learning activity, even for a short time, thus relieving the teachers of their teaching responsibilities. Therefore, museums must find ways to actively involve the teachers if they want to build a real and lasting partnership. It is indeed a difficult process to achieve. The teachers' expectations arise also from their limited experiences with other forms of museum education, other than the classic visit and workshops led by museographers/museum educators in museums. Museum educators could assist primary school teachers who want to organize a visit or a workshop in the museum, including with the bureaucratic procedures (filling out the documents and agreements for the student file, facilitating communication with the school management, etc.).

Prior communication between the museum educator/tour guide and the teacher, geared at understanding the student's learning needs, interests, cognitive ability, prior knowledge, and ability to focus, is paramount for adapting the content and the subject matter of the guided tours for different school groups. In addition, embedding interactivity and experiential learning (learning by doing) in the structure of the museum visit or the design of other museum activities could lead to a better experience and enhance educational goals.

The poor visibility of the educational offer of museums, especially of small and medium-sized ones, could be addressed through an online collaborative platform where museums could post their offers, discounts, schedules, costs, etc. for all the educational activities and workshops for students. Teachers appreciate such workshops more than classic visits, but the information does not always reach them.

Teachers also need more incentives to organize museum visits and participate in educational programs in museums. Such incentives could be designed on a systemic level and, thus, embedded into educational policies and processes, as well as offered by museums to ensure better cooperation with teachers. Schools and museums could reward teaching staff whose interactions with museums might be considered best practices for integrating cultural heritage into the learning and teaching process. Although the interviewed teachers recognized the relevance of the framework in which they operated, their perspective was mostly operative, rather than strategic and systemic. This situation is different from the perceptions of teachers in other regions, such as Reggio Emilia in Italy, who stress the importance of strategic partnerships between schools and museums, whilst considering that political will is essential for good cooperation (Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, & Atenas, 2021, p. 12).

Nevertheless, we wish to point out that the individual characteristics and personal interests of teachers are very relevant for good and effective cooperation with museums. A previous study on Romanian teachers revealed two categories of teachers – leaders and followers (Zbucnea & Ivan, 2021, pp. 285-286). The leaders capitalize on their previous experience to enrich the learning and teaching process in the classroom with heritage-related resources and activities. By comparison, the followers are rather passive although they declare to be interested in integrating heritage into their educational discourse.

In conclusion, the study reveals that, at least in Romania, it is necessary to familiarize teachers with the wide variety of options and possibilities to integrate museum heritage into the curriculum-based teaching and learning process in schools. Museums could encourage the integration of heritage in the didactic activity by organizing thematic workshops in schools and by the co-opting school or local libraries to ensure the logistics of these workshops. These approaches could offer solutions to some of the difficulties mentioned by the teachers: costs/ fees, transportation, and the impossibility of traveling with an entire class of students. Finally, teachers who carry out such activities could include heritage-based educational resources in the teaching-learning process, but at this stage, they need support and guidance when it comes to object-based learning,

object interpretation, and creating connections between the subject-specific competencies mandated by the national curriculum and the museum heritage.

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### Acknowledgments

This article contains data, conclusions, and recommendations obtained from focus-group-based research conducted by Loredana Ivan, alongside Alexandra Zbucnea, Mona-Silvia Timofte, and Iulia Iordan, with support from Monica Bumbuş, Eliana Radu, Nicoleta Briciu, Gabriela Bărbulescu, and Nela Burcea. The research is part of "But why bring the museum to school", a project developed and implemented by the Da'DeCe Association, in partnership with the Museum of Bucharest and the Didactic Corp House of Bucharest. The project was financed by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (ANCF), Romania. <https://afcn.ro/> The project does not necessarily represent the position of the ANCF. The ANCF is not responsible for the content of the project or how the results of the project may be used. These are entirely the responsibility of the beneficiary of the financing.

Da'DeCe Association - <https://asociatiadadece.ro>

The Museum of Bucharest - <https://muzeulbucurestiului.ro/>

The Didactic Corp House of Bucharest - <https://www.ccd-bucuresti.org/index.php/ro/>

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