



Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Functioning of Museums: An Assessment Study

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ABSTRACT: *The worldwide COVID-19 dilemma has had and will continue to have a profound effect on museums all around the world. By March 2020, most cultural institutions would have been permanently shut down (or at the very least, their services would have been drastically reduced), and most exhibitions, events, and performances would have been cancelled or moved. In response, there were significant initiatives to offer substitute or supplementary services via digital channels. In their response to the epidemic, museums were prompt and pro-active, refocusing on serving the needs of their local communities. Museums contributed to the distribution of medical supplies by giving masks and gloves to hospitals. By expanding its digital services to engage individuals at home, museums helped to reduce loneliness and isolation. By making tests, games, and educational resources available online, museums kept up their informal education function from a distance. The survey conducted by various agencies recommended for immediate action, for mid-term considerations and for long-term strategy urging the economic support for museum operations, investment in digital cultural heritage, and making museums fit for crises. This paper is based on certain observations of eminent scholars on present situation of museums due to lockdown and the future challenges that the museums will face after re-opening, in post pandemic period.*

KEYWORDS: *Pandemic, Covid-19, Digital Cultural Heritage, Unprecedented, Lockdown.*

INTRODUCTION

The new corona virus raised fears all around the world. Transportation and tourism had been significantly hampered by quarantines, travel restrictions, and airline cancellations. The 'world's factory' had been placed on hold due to delays in the mass production and distribution of items throughout China. Uncertainties and disruptions in the supply chain had shaken global financial markets. Mass meetings had been called off, even one thousand miles away at religious gatherings, trade shows, and school celebrations. Because they were concerned that this sinister apparition may show up on their doorstep, several towns were opposed to quarantine facilities' existence [1].

Worldwide, museums were finding it difficult to adjust to the problems brought on by the ongoing corona virus pandemic. Some nations were damaged harder than others, such as Croatia, whose museums were struggling in especially after an earthquake devastated the region around the capital Zagreb on March 22, 2020. It caused extensive damage, including damage to museums, and was the strongest storm in the area in 140 years. The catastrophe struck as the nation was already dealing with the Covid-19 situation [2]. The majority of museums on the continent, according to the Network of European Museum Organizations (NEMO), were shut down.

In order to help museums, survive this difficult moment and ensure the viability of the cultural sector as a whole, it is urging "governments at all levels in Europe to adopt suitable emergency measures" [3]. In response to the crisis, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in the US has urged congress to enact Covid-19 economic relief legislation that would allocate at least \$4 billion in emergency aid, especially for nonprofit museums. In statement issued on 19 March, the AAM said: "Nationwide, our museums are losing at least \$33m a day due to closures as a result of Covid-19 and will be in desperate need of significant federal support to maintain jobs, secure our cultural heritage, help to rebuild our nation's tourism industry – and simply to survive the months to come."

Many of New York's main institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Guggenheim, closed on March 13, 2020, as a result of the city's severe corona virus outbreak. Due to the Novel Corona Virus Pandemic, organisations in the arts and cultural sector around the world gradually curtailed and eventually stopped offering public events through the first quarter of 2020. (COVID-19). By the end of March, the majority of cultural heritage institutions were closed, and artistic events had been postponed or cancelled, either voluntarily or at the direction of the government, starting with China, East Asia, and then globally. The majority of the world's nations have been in total lockdown for more than 60 days, and this has caused major issues for museums in terms of financial loss, collection care, employee well-being, educational offerings, and other visitor services. In contrast, museums responded to the epidemic quickly and proactively by refocusing on serving the needs of their local communities.

Museums contributed to the distribution of medical supplies by giving masks and gloves to hospitals. By expanding its digital services to engage individuals at home, museums helped to reduce loneliness and isolation. By encouraging people to exchange artefacts and tales to preserve and learn from this particular period, museums cultivated a sense of trust and community. By making tests, games, and educational resources available online, museums kept up their informal education function from a distance. In these times of crisis, the museums have a variety of duties to accomplish. To adapt to the crises, they must shift their priorities and their point of concentration. The paradigm shift for the digital age now affects museums as well. As a result, we should be prepared for any challenges that may arise during and after a pandemic. In reality, the time has arrived for us to seize this chance to capitalize on the crisis.

SERIOUS CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY MUSEUMS DUE TO PANDEMIC

If people are unable to visit museums, how can they remain relevant? Can shows, which take years to design and put up, be moved to the digital space so that museums can remain open virtually? A wide range of problems have been posed for museums as a result of this crisis, some of which concern their relevance - if they must remain closed - and others which concern how museums may best change to reflect the current reality and what their role may be post-COVID-19 [4]. The Economy of the museums has fallen due to pandemic. Especially the museums run by their income is on the verge of complete closure as their incomes become zero during this period. How can we survive? Do we have some plan for alternate source of income? These are the questions we have to answer to sustained in the time of crises.

Another prime concern for the museum professionals during pandemic is, how to save the collection from the agencies of Biodeterioration? Particularly, the collection of organic origin like paper, wood, leather, textile and horns etc. are prone to be affected by the insect pests and

microorganisms if they are not kept in the controlled environment like maintained temperature and humidity. During the lockdown it is very difficult for the museums to maintain controlled environment in the museums. Worldwide museums are currently experiencing and will continue to experience the effects of the global Corona virus outbreak. The Network of European Museum Organizations started documenting and analysing the economic impact on museums as well as showing examples of how museums have taken advantage of and are continuing to fully utilise digital opportunities in order to better understand the situation that has been confronting museums, particularly in Europe, over the past few weeks.

Nearly 1,000 survey responses from 48 different museums were gathered between 24 March and 30 April 2020 and were examined for the study. The survey's results have been condensed as follows [3]:

1. The vast majority of museums in Europe and the rest of the world are shut. Many European museums will reopen to the public in May or June 2020, according to a NEMO survey. But it will be a while before museum operations are the same as we once knew them.
2. A total of 930 museums disclosed the proportion of their staff that worked remotely. Over 80% of respondents say that their staff members have been working remotely. In response to NEMO's study, 224 museum professionals claimed that fewer than 20% of their personnel has been working from home, while 155 report that more than 50% of their staff has been doing so (Figure-1).

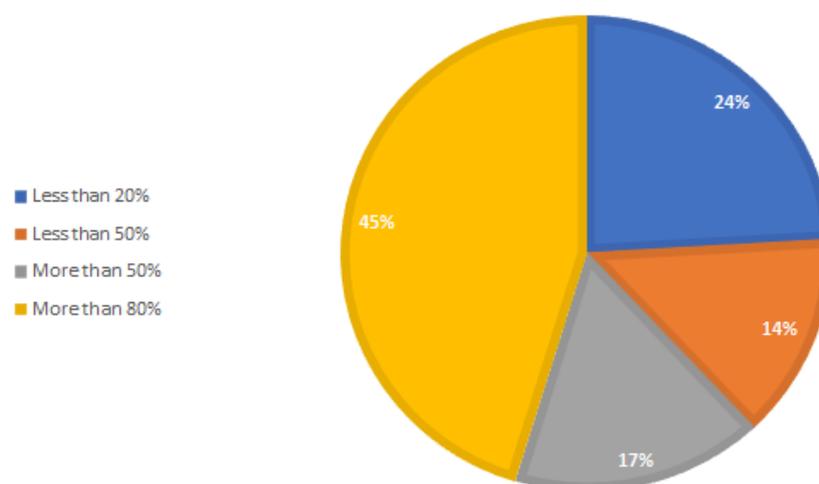


Figure 1: Percentage of museum staff work from home (Courtesy: NEMO Report)

3. Due to closures and travel delays, 3 out of 5 museums reported losing an average of €20,300 per week. Many museums reported a significant loss of income of 75–80%, with larger museums and the museums in tourist areas claiming weekly losses totaling hundreds of thousands of Euros, while some museums have found their budgets to be very slightly affected as of yet (Figure-2).
4. The majority of European museums have not yet had to let any employees go. However, three out of ten museums have suspended their agreements with independent contractors, and three out of five museums have completely ceased their volunteer programmes.
5. Relying on a broad range of revenue streams helps museums be adaptable and resilient. Private income streams, however, are more prone to changes in the market. According to

the survey, museums that receive the majority of their income from private sources have been more vulnerable lately.

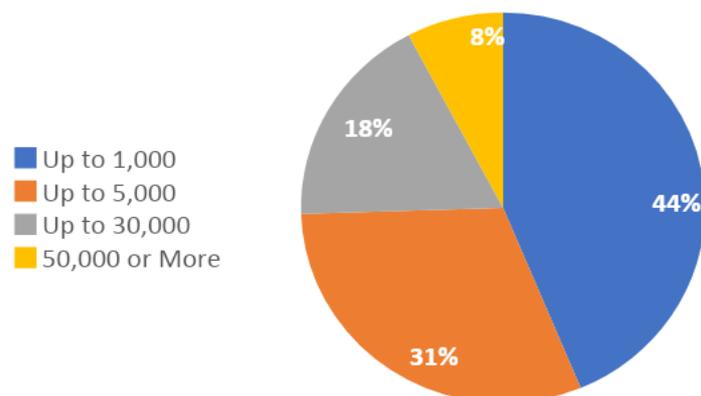


Figure 2: Percentage of reported weekly income in Euros (Courtesy: NEMO Report)

- Beyond the current crisis, the global decline in tourism has a direct and significant impact on museums. The OECD forecasts a 50–70% decline in world tourism activity. A long-term severe decline in revenue from museum admission, shops, and cafes is anticipated to endure until the end of 2020, given that cultural tourism makes up 40% of all travel in Europe and that 40% of travellers choose their location based on its cultural offerings.
- To reach their audiences, 4 out of 5 museums have increased their digital offerings, frequently by having staff members take on new responsibilities. Nearly half of those surveyed said their museum currently offers one or more new online services (Figure 3).

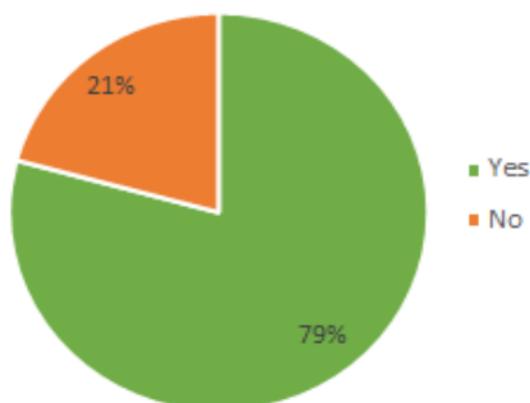


Figure 3: Showing increase of digital services on online activities during lockdown period (4 April-30 April) (Courtesy: NEMO Report)

- During the reporting period, 2 out of 5 museums reported an increase in internet visitation of between 10 and 150%.
- There is no rise in output without an increase in input, according to our poll, which found that museums that were able to modify staff responsibilities and/or add resources were also able to expand their digital offerings and saw an uptick in online visitors.
- People visit museums for their educational and content-related value. Museums stated that educational and collections-related items, including video and film content, were the most well-liked with online audiences after social media.

11. This survey has shown that while online museums are significant extensions and complements of physical museums, there is currently no reliable tool to measure online visitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The advice of numerous distinguished experts and the poll results lead to calls for immediate action, midterm thought, and long-term planning, urging:

Financial assistance for museum operations

Even after the initial crisis has passed, museums will continue to suffer from financial losses and altered visitor behaviour caused by the pandemic due to the significant drop in international travel and increased health security measures, which come at significant additional expense. NEMO calls on governments at all levels to assist museums and fill the income gap, allowing them to maintain their employees and physical infrastructure during these trying times. Governments must also assist museums in their continuous transition by providing the resources needed in the new post-pandemic environment.

Financial support for digital cultural heritage

In recent weeks, digital engagement and cultural heritage have proven their worth by bringing people together, fostering creativity, exchanging personal stories, and providing a virtual place for the development of group ideas. Stakeholders at all levels should recognize this.

- The recognition should eventually result in investments in digital infrastructure and services. It has been proved to be excellent practise to take into account the involvement of digital audiences together with the digital services and activities provided by museums as determinants of success in assessment frameworks.
- Standardized metrics for gauging web traffic can help with benchmarking, decision-making, and resource allocation. Museums are lagging behind in the transition to digital literacy. While they have conducted visitor research and analysis for exhibitions and educational programmes on-site, they should be given the tools and training necessary to do so online.
- Invest in the collections and in-depth content that distinguish museums. The digital future of museums will include enjoyable, interesting, and creative digital offers. To compete with other digital businesses and offer cutting-edge cultural experiences online, museums must have enough resources.

Making museums prepared for crises:

Government should support museums as soon as they are ready to reopen to the public, providing them with the necessary infrastructure and health safety precautions. The future crisis awareness, preparedness, control, and reaction strategies must include emergency plans for both the public and internal work processes, and this is something that museums and society as a whole must work toward. This crisis has prompted new working practises and more flexible work obligations in museums; these practises, as well as more adaptable work arrangements in museums generally, should be taken into consideration going forward. Museum success occurs in a global context; museums are not isolated entities. Supporting global collaboration, exchanging knowledge, setting benchmarks, and amplifying the voices of shared concerns are crucial during times of crises. Networks serve as a key platform in this. All levels of stakeholders are being addressed by NEMO. There is no quick way to get back to

business as usual; rather than setting returning to business as usual as our objective, we must learn from this crisis in order to respond, alleviate, adapt, and integrate efficiently.

Pandemic collection care

Every museum's collection serves as its foundation for a variety of reasons. It is significant due to its Nobel potential, educational potential, historical significance, etc. The benefits of natural science collections and museums to modern civilization have been extensively written about. These can be categorized into three groups:

- Education: Public exhibits and outreach programmes have provided significant educational benefits, and many museums play significant roles in tertiary natural science education, particularly for postgraduates.
- Research: Natural history museum research has led to previously unheard-of advancements in our knowledge of the living world. These important developments in biological theory have primarily affected evolutionary biology. Applications of biological knowledge acquired from collections to address issues with human health and agriculture, as well as to generate profit [5].
- Preservation of biological knowledge is accomplished via specimens kept in natural science collections. Although their importance in the scientific sciences' epistemology is little understood, these collections serve as living libraries [6].

However, in a state of total lockdown brought on by the Covid-19 Pandemic, the natural history collections in museums run the risk of being threatened by agents of biodeterioration. They are most negatively impacted because lockdown prevents museums from maintaining the controlled climatic environment in which the collections are maintained or shown. By attacking fungi and insects, leather, textile, wood, and paper things start to deteriorate.

What can museums do when they reopen?

Museums all across the world were anticipating their reopening as soon as the lockdown was lifted. Few museums are fully closed and unable to even continue their services and activities in online mode due to inadequate resources, especially the tiny museums with little funding. Some museums had already opened with minimal staff and services and still rely mostly on their digital services. However, when museums reopen or do so following a pandemic, their first goals and concerns should be the personnel and visitors' health and safety. Considering the museum's budget, the other major challenges include developing measures to offset their financial loss as well as to promote and expand their digital operations. The following are some of the museums' reopening-related activities and priorities.

- Museums are required to give visitors masks and hand sanitizers (Figure-4)
- Setting a visiting cap to preserve a sense of physical distance (Figure-5).
- Since museums can't rely on their digital operations for very long, we need consider other instruments as well to draw visitors.
- Museums need to develop plans for the general welfare and safety of their employees and visitors.
- Museum managers should consider their options and make some strategies to deal with the financial loss brought on by the Covid-19 Pandemic-related lockout.

- How can museums easily and smoothly resume their educational and other services during the post-pandemic period? The managers must take this into consideration.
- In order to encourage tourists to attend the museum, museums should instil a sense of faith in them.
- Museums should make some plans for recovering damages and compile an assessment report of the deterioration of objects due to climatic variables and agents of biodeterioration during lockdown.



Figure 4: Visitor using mask provided at Tate Museum



Figure 5: Social Distancing at National Gallery of Arts, DC

CONCLUSION

There is a chance to take some longer views if we consider the reality of the current Covid-19 situation. While frightening, Covid-19 may be the catalyst needed to initiate the important adjustments that museums have been under pressure to make for some time. Museums are much less likely to develop the evolved, healthy, and flexible identities that will be required to sustain their roles as information keepers and communicators in the post-epidemic world if they adopt the "let's sit this out, and see what happens" approach. The present corona virus

(COVID-19) outbreak has a significant impact on the cultural and creative industries, and museums are no exception. In order to encourage community resilience at this time, it is advised to adhere to the following eight steps of the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

1. Put your personal health and safety first.
2. Try to concentrate on what you do well and look for various methods of accomplishing it; explore novel ideas and go back to tried-and-true practises.
3. Keep an eye on societal changes and developments; pay attention to your local communities; and decide how you can contribute.
4. Keep in close communication with partners, collaborators, and community activities and keep in mind that you are not alone.
5. Study the past.
6. Take into account the potential for swift action in gathering information about the crisis and its effects.
7. Make the most of the opportunity.
8. Maintain your unity and aid us in our lobbying campaigns.

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