



MUSEUMS AND COMMUNICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY The Portuguese case

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ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind the importance of communication for the museum, in our text we take a journey through museums from their foundation to the present day, and the relationship they have with the communication, both on the global stage and in the local Portuguese context. Since the eighteenth century, museums have emerged with the central function of communicating ideas, political ideas about communities and their respective social and cultural organizations. This trip ends with the challenges posed to today's museums from the point of view of the use of new means of communication such as the Internet or Smartphones. What are the communicative strategies of museums in an increasingly technological world? Will the use of these new means of communication, such as the Internet, eliminate physical visits to museums? Will virtual museums replace physical spaces? These will be the questions that we propose to answer in this text, using the Portuguese national museum framework as an example.

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1. Introduction

The museum, as we know it today, is an invention of the modern society, born and developed between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries.

As stated in the Declaration of Caracas (1992), the museum as a means of communication transmits messages through the specific language of the exhibitions, in the articulation of objects-signs, meanings, ideas and emotions, producing discourses about culture, life and nature; whereas this language is not verbal, but broad and total, closer to the perception of reality and the perceptual capacities of all individuals; that as signs of the museological language, objects have no value in themselves, but represent values and meanings in the different cultural languages in which they are immersed (Declaration of Caracas, 1992, p. 251).

Using several sources and a cross-referenced methodology, which included "the use of statistical data, and the use of textual analysis" (Shore, 2000, p. 7), as well as various documentary sources such as reports, legislation, etc., we intend to analyze the museums as important communicational tools, in different times and spaces, starting from the international context to the Portuguese one. Considering the path of the modern museum, we will see that it, both as an institution and as a place where objects and collections are collected, conserved, and exhibited, was born with a communicative intentionality. If, on the one hand, the museum was created by the political and economic elites of the Renaissance, to communicate their ideas about society and themselves as social groups, capable of materializing their status and prestige through the collections, on the other hand, it served the political purposes arising from the French Revolution, of building the idea of the national citizen.

Overcoming the challenges posed by the social dynamics that spanned the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, the museum entered in the twenty-first century facing new challenges. This has been a century characterized by profound and accelerated social and technological changes, which have transformed the communication types prevalent throughout the twentieth century. The use of the Internet and digital platforms has become massive, the telephone has evolved into the smartphone and has allowed new access forms to the information and to the communication, also by museums. Both, internationally and in the Portuguese case, museum institutions have used new information and communication technologies to disseminate the cultural heritage of the community they represent. But the new means of communication have also served as a driving force in attracting new audiences to the museums.

This text is divided into two parts, which we consider fundamental to understand the relationship between the museum and communication. In the first part, entitled "Museums and Communication: elitism and democracy", we explore the path of museums as societal communicative tools over the time.

Corresponding to the revolution in the media observed in this century, the second part entitled "Museums and Communication in the XXI Century: The Portuguese case", focuses on the emergence and use of new communication technologies and the added value that their use represents for museums, both in the international stage as in the Portuguese one.

2. Museums and Communication: Elitism and Democracy

Great historical civilizations such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Greece, or Rome felt the need to conserve, collect and exhibit objects to the public as a way of communicating their glorious deeds and asserting their power in the spatio-temporal context of their time. It would be, however, in Classical Greece that we would find the institutions closest to the museum as an organization as it is currently conceived. The Greeks not only preserved ancient and valuable objects in their temples, but also exposed these objects and collections to the public as a means of internal and external communication of their achievements, battles won or their taste for the arts, creating the *pinakothekai* and the *museion* (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005). The Greek *museion* was an institution dedicated to knowledge and to the transmission of knowledge, having been conceived by Ptolemy I, in Alexandria, in the year 290 BC.

According to Ballart and Tresserras (2005), the Romans also had the habit of keeping the offerings made to the Gods in small temples, as well as collecting. If, on the one hand, there was still no awareness of national good, of belonging to a community that would only be born several centuries later, there was a concern on the part of several Roman collectors such as Agrippa, with the offer of their collections for public use. Hadrian purposely built a building to display his private collections.

In the Middle Ages, Nobility and Clergy collected rare objects, made of precious metals, relics, sculptures, and a whole paraphernalia of religious elements. In the case of both the Nobility and the Clergy, these collections belonged to the private sector and served to communicate and attest to their prestige in the social context of the time. In the case of the Clergy, the exhibition to the public of these religious objects, in their places of worship, attested to and communicated the values of the Christian faith.

The Renaissance collections were mainly of private access, being owned by great families such as the Florentine Medici, with the main objective of enriching and honoring outstanding families of the time, especially merchants and an emerging bourgeoisie. The Florentine Lorenzo the Magnificent was the first to call his private collection a "museum", hiring a curator and admitting visits to which he communicated the power of his family, materialized in the exhibition of various objects and collections (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005).

Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, families of the nobility, princes, kings and even wealthy merchants committed themselves to collecting, conserving and exhibiting objects and collections in galleries and palaces that they called "theatrum, painting galleries, portrait gallery, museo, cabinet of curiosities, chamber of wonders, cabinet of antiques, studiolo, antiquarium, nymphoeo, treasure" (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005, p. 36).

Also in Portugal, many of these families made an effort to communicate their prestige and wealth, through collections of antique and/or rare objects, highlighting the collection of "antiquities" of Afonso, 1st Duke of Bragança (1377-1461), whom Sousa (1738) refers to as a duke inclined "to good letters, (...) he had a bookstore, which he adorned with various antiques, and many he brought when he was outside the kingdom, thus forming a house of rare things, which today is called a museum" (Caetano, 1738, p. 84).

Museums, as social institutions, reflect, in their processes of communication with the public, the different social dynamics, both in space and in time. The revolution of knowledge that took place in the West, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and which has lasted to the present day, has been reflected both, in its organization, and in the techniques and materials used in communication with the public. In this context, museums used their collection objects as a way of communicating the scientific societies evolution towards a future that was intended to be better in a linear way (Brito, 2006).

The eighteenth century was, therefore, marked by the consolidation of science, reason, and the utopia of progress. The museum, which collects, preserves, and exhibits the historical testimonies of the nation such as written documents, archaeological remains and monuments, becomes fundamental to explain and communicate to others, the progress of "our national society" over the time. The preservation and the inventory of movable and immovable objects, now called cultural heritage, the gathering antiquities collections, or the excavation of archaeological sites acquired meaning at a time when the new Nation-States were born that wanted to be progressive, secular, based on rationalism. In 1759 the British monarchy supported the foundation of the first great national museum, the British Museum, and in 1765 the projects for the foundation of the Louvre Museum were already being designed, which would be created in 1793. Both communicated the great deeds of these two imperial nations.

In Europe, and inherently in Portugal, the "national" museums not only communicated the death of the ancient régime, and of its social groups, the nobility, and the clergy, but also began to testify to the State's commitment to enforce the ideals that came out of the French Revolution, serving to teach the people to be citizens (Temudo, 2016). Some of the most striking museums of our time were inaugurated at this time, such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, founded in 1815, or the Prado Museum, opened to the public in 1819, where it would be possible to admire, through the works of painters, sculptors and other artists, the collective identity of a people (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005).

In Portugal, King Pedro opened doors "to the first museological expression of Portuguese liberalism" (Almeida, 2006-2007, p. 31), having inaugurated the "Museum of Paintings, Prints and Fine Arts in the city of Porto in 1821" (Almeida, 2006-2007, p. 31).

On the other hand, and even though industrialization in Portugal had been later and more tenuous compared to other European countries, there was a need on the part of the national political powers to use museums as a means of communicating the needs of the country's industrial development. The museum at the service of the society became a means of communication by the national political powers, of the pressing need for the Portuguese industrial development, and thus the Conservatory of Arts and

Crafts of Lisbon was founded in 1836. In 1837 the Porto Conservatory of Arts and Crafts was created by Manuel da Silva Passos. Through these spaces, it was intended that the arts and sciences would serve to communicate and train professionals capable of developing the national industry (Ramos, 1993).

The museum consolidated its position as a temple of knowledge and communication in the second half of the nineteenth century, in a period marked by the historicism and the positivism. The concern with building a scientific history through the analysis of material testimonies such as monuments has become fundamental for the construction and understanding of the nation's path. Thus, archaeological museums are inaugurated all over the European continent. In this context, museums assume a communicative role, through which the State communicates, transmits, and educates its citizens to the notion of the national community.

As in Spain, France, or Germany, in Portugal, Archaeology stood out in nineteenth-century museum policies. In 1857 the Museum of Geological Services was inaugurated such as the Carmo Archeological Museum, in 1864, among others (Ramos, 1993).

In 1893, the Portuguese Ethnographic Museum was founded, which gave rise to the Doctor Leite de Vasconcelos National Museum of Archaeology, which aimed to "bring together objects of multiple natures and make the Portuguese people known, under the most varied aspects", emphasizing once again the communicative aspect of the museum in the construction of the nation (Carrilho, 2016, p. 15).

On the other hand, the Nation States bet in this period on scientific-technological development, so it is not only a matter of legitimizing the notion of national community through the "fabrication" of the national citizen, but also of building a community developed from a scientific and technological point of view. Both in Europe and in the United States of America, their nations compete for the scientific and the technological development. In this context, museums play an important role in the process of both, internal communication, due to the role they play in the training of their citizens and communicate to their counterparts this economic development based mainly on industrial creation and development. In the mid-19th century, museums linked to industry were founded, such as the British Manufacture Museum, which was the origin of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

In Portugal, in this period, the Regeneration or the also known *Fontismo* took place. Developed by António Maria de Fontes Pereira de Melo, Regeneration aimed to put an end to the social conflicts and promote the growth of economic wealth. In this sense, giving priority to the Portuguese industrial development and recognizing the important role of museums as means of communication and training, Fontes Pereira de Melo created, in 1852, the Industrial Institute of Lisbon and the Industrial School of Porto, with the "respective Industrial Museums, (...), being replaced in 1864, by decree of 20 December, ... in Technological Museums, conceived as collections of models, drawings, instruments, products and materials that illustrated teaching. (...)" (Carrilho, 2016, pp. 11-12).

The end of the nineteenth century marked an important period for the museum and its importance as a communication tool, so much so that in November 1894, an instruction from the French National Convention for the Conservation of Cultural Property determined that historical and artistic objects should be preserved "to serve the arts, science and education" (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005, p. 43).

In Portugal, it was determined at this time that "cultural heritage should be accessible to the public and be at the service of education" (Ramos, 1993, p. 30). Accessibility and communication were fundamental to this communication process, which deepened with the establishment of the Portuguese Republic in 1910. The new republican government, presided over by Teófilo Braga, underlining the importance of the museum as a means of communicating the ideals of the Republic, ordered the inauguration, in 1911, of the Revolution of 5 October Museum. This museum would communicate both to the Portuguese citizens who witnessed the revolution and to their descendants, "a distant memory of what has happened now, and seen through the ages, they will reach the importance and veneration that is given to the ancient things..." (The Museum of the Revolution inaugurated on December 29, 1911, p. 6).

In the Portuguese case, the change to the republican regime represented a clear assumption of the importance of museums as fundamental means of education and communication of political ideas to the population. For this reason, this period was characterized by the largest legislative production related to the museums, in Portugal, up to that time. In this context, we underline the Decree No. 1 of May 26, 1911, which determined that

for the purposes of preserving our cultural heritage, the national territory was divided into three artistic districts, those of the south, center and north, based in Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto (art. 1), at the headquarters of which would operate a Council of Art and Archaeology, to which the Republic entrusted, among others, the custody of monuments and the supreme direction of museums; they considered museums as a fundamental complement of the artistic education and an essential element of the general education; without seeking to enclose all the artistic values then dispersed throughout the country in museums, these should become, as much as possible, living standards of our culture and typical way of being, through the ages; designated the museums belonging to the three districts: in the 1st, the National Museum of Ancient Art, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the National Coach Museum and the Portuguese Ethnological Museum, ..., in the 3rd district, it determined that the D. Pedro Athenaeum was renamed the Soares dos Reis Museum; ... in the 2nd they created a General Museum of Art, with the designation of Machado de Castro Museum ... (Ramos, 1993, p. 45-46).

Museums suffered severe blows, almost to death, due to the emergence of the modernist movement, at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. Museums were tools that, instead of being available for the construction of free, fraternal, and equal citizens before the law, served the purposes of the bourgeoisie in consolidating its economic, political, social, and cultural power.

In response to criticism from modernist currents such as Futurism, in which Fillipo Tommaso Marinetti considered, in his Futurist Manifesto, museums cemeteries where objects slept eternally as boring and unknown beings (Marinetti, 1909), not only did museography develop with new and more sophisticated exhibition techniques, but in the field of communication, advances were remarkable. The communicating museums favored school views and created pedagogical departments. Communication with the public through the museums and their objects began to arouse the interest of the museum institutions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first museology schools were born, as well as the professional associations of the sector, making the work of the museologist a recognized profession.

The twentieth century was also characterized by the European dictatorships and their nationalist projects. In Italy, Germany, Spain or Portugal, museums have been used as political propaganda by the extreme right-wing dictatorial regimes. In the Portuguese case, the Museum of Popular Art inauguration, as part of the Portuguese World Exhibition, realized in 1940, stood out, among others. The Museum of Popular Art emerged as a means of communication for the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese dictatorship, reflecting Portugal as a harmonious nation "united around stereotypes and cultural marks associated with its provinces, where it all began. (...) In it (Museum of Popular Art) are placed the objects that the political powers of the time considered capable of representing the cultural unity of the nation, in heterogeneity" (Magalhães, 2016, p. 446).

The twentieth century was also characterized by the affirmation of the United States of America as a global power, communicating this fact to the world, through the inauguration of some of what would become the largest museums in the world, such as the MOMA in New York, inaugurated in 1929, or the National Gallery, in Washington, founded in 1941.

After the Second World War, the museum framework changed, marking an unprecedented museums development, especially those in the United States. Victorious from the war, the USA communicated to the world its consolidation as a global cultural power, inaugurating globally remarkable museums such as the Guggenheim Museum, in New York, in 1959. Also, the USA has instilled in art a new entrepreneurial vision that has led to an unprecedented development of the world art market (Ballart & Tresserras, 2005).

The second half of the twentieth century was also remarkable in the museums field, as accelerated globalization, and the change in the world order of the period following the Second World War led to the emergence of transnational organizations that would define the museums relations and policies through worldwide, namely regarding to the relations between museums and communication. The United Nations (UN) was created in 1945, following the devastation caused by the World War II, with the aim of preventing the repetition of this type of conflict with negative consequences for the humanity. In the field of the global coordination of cultural activities and the safeguarding of the cultural heritage, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emerged in 1945. UNESCO is a specialized agency of the UN, with the objective of promoting the free circulation of ideas

through audiovisual media, fostering freedom of the press and the independence, pluralism, and diversity of the media, through the International Programme for the Promotion of Communication. The importance of the communication is highlighted by UNESCO, whose mission is to contribute to the building of a culture of peace, the eradication of poverty, the sustainable development and to promote the intercultural dialogue through education, sciences, culture, communication, and information (United Nations, 2024).

In 1946, the ICOM (International Council of Museums) was created, which would mark the global museum policies in all their fields, namely communication. Communication will be at the center of ICOM's reflections and guidelines, particularly from the end of the twentieth century, and its importance will be underlined throughout the twenty-first century.

The ICOM is an organization defined as a

ICOM is a membership association and a non-governmental organization which establishes professional and ethical standards for museum activities. As forum of experts, it makes recommendations on issues related to cultural heritage, promotes capacity building and advances knowledge. ICOM is the voice of museum professionals on international stage and raises public cultural awareness through global networks and co-operation programmes (International Council of Museums, 2024).

The 60s and 70s years of the last century were characterized by crises and social debates about the museum's role, which culminated in the French protests of May 1968. Once again, the current social order, dominated by capitalism, consumerism, and US imperialism, was contested. This period constituted a second crisis for traditional institutions such as museums, accused of communicating and serving the interests of a privileged minority. In the face of criticism of the elitism of museums, they have no choice but to start renovating.

New and old objectives of museums were reviewed and deepened, developing a conception of communication that would lead to an effective civic education and community development. The museum should be concerned with encouraging the reflexion that would lead citizens to become aware of their world and to question it. In this context, the concept of neighborhood museum emerged in the USA and Mexico. However, the most significant response to the museum crisis triggered by May '68 emerged in 1972, in Santiago de Chile, which, bringing together, in a round table, several representatives of museums from all over the world, discussed the social function of museums. From this meeting emerged the idea that the museum should be a communicative and empowering tool for all the citizens, regardless of age group, gender, or others. The concept of New Museology was born in this meeting.

The New Museology defined a new way of making the museum, proposing new approaches to the community, adopting new conceptions of museum, object and public. The museum came to be considered an entire territory, objects or collections came to be constituted by the cultural heritage of that territory, and the public came to be understood as the community (Magalhães, 2003, 2019). Georges Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine Bohan, proposing the concept of Eco Museum, developed the idea of an integral museum, which are museums at the service of small local and regional communities, in a return to the idea of small local communities, pure and close to the nature (Almeida, 1996).

In Portugal, museums and museology entered a new phase with the Carnation Revolution, which took place on April 25, 1974, re-implementing the democracy. Freed from the shackle of the "Estado Novo" dictatorship, museums began to be used to communicate the new democratic values inherent to the revolution, thus fulfilling their social function. In the democratic context, the concept of Eco Museum was introduced in Portugal, by António Nabais and Mário Moutinho (Magalhães, 2003), having acquired a relevant expression in the constitution of the Municipal Eco Museum of Seixal, in 1992. This last quarter of the century, coinciding with democracy, was fertile in terms of the affirmation of museology and museums in Portugal, with the creation of the International Movement for New Museology, in Lisbon, in 1985 ... (Ramos, 1993), among other initiatives.

The concern to involve the community with its cultural heritage, evidenced by the New Museology, would be expressed in the recommendation made by the Declaration of Caracas, according to which the museum should seek "full participation in its communicative function, as a space for the relationship of individuals and communities with their cultural heritage, and as links of social integration. Considering

in their discourses and exhibition languages the different communities cultural codes ... allowing their recognition and appreciation..." (Declaration of Caracas, 1992, p. 252).

The beginning of the twenty-first century brought new challenges and renewed the museums roles. The museum audience grow in number and quality, with higher levels of education and training, as well as a greater economic power. A mass society, open, democratic, and economically more powerful, with access to new technologies and means of communication, will redefine the museum's communicative role within the society.

3. Museums and Communication in the 21st Century: The Portuguese Case

As we saw in the first part of this text, the communication was inherent to the museum project. Museums and their content, objects, and collections, served to communicate ideas about the organization and the life of a community, a particular social group, or a society. Although communication has been part of modern museum projects since its inception, it was, however, at the end of the twentieth century and already in the twenty-first century, that the communicational function was underlined by the transnational institutions that regulate the museology and museums at a global level, such as ICOM.

In 1992, and with the aim of reflecting on the Museum's mission in the contemporary world, UNESCO, the Regional Office of Culture for Latin America, and the Caribbean (ORCALC), and ICOM held the Seminar "The Mission of Museums in Latin America Today: New Challenges", which took place in Caracas, Venezuela, between January 16 and February 6, 1992. In this seminar, which brought together personalities linked to management functions in museums from different countries, the mission of the museum, as one of the main agents of the region integral development, was reflected, giving rise to the Declaration of Caracas. Among other issues relevant to the museology at the end of the twentieth century, it was mentioned that

The museum's function is fundamentally a communication process that explains and guides the specific activities of the museum, such as the collection, conservation, and exhibition of the cultural and natural heritage. This means that museums are not only sources of information or instruments of education, but spaces and means of communication that serve to establish the interaction of the community with the cultural process and products (Declaration of Caracas 1992, p. 250-251)

These institutions seemed to foresee the new challenges that the twenty-first century would bring to the level of the museum communication. The beginning of the century was characterized by the massification of the information and communication new means and technologies, such as the internet or smartphones, in a close relationship with the development of an increasingly sophisticated software and hardware. The communication new means, resulting from the technological innovation, have allowed museums to: "1) disseminate culture and knowledge; 2) communicational accessibility; 3) the ability to disseminate, give access to and improve documentary archives; 4) improve the attractiveness of exhibitions; 5) to improve museum organizations as places for greater diversity of professionals to develop; 6) to improve museums as more adaptable, flexible and sustainable organizations" (Kemp, 2024, p. 65) on a scale never before experienced by the humanity.

On the other hand, these information and communication technologies have also enabled the development of virtual websites and apps that provide museums with the public to communicate on a global, unprecedented scale and without the need for physical movement of people. The low price of the electronic internet access equipment, as well as the services provided by both, communication companies and media, have democratized the access to the digital content, namely those related to museums and their content. In this context, museums felt the need to build websites or develop mobile phone applications, to boost a communication strategy with the public that should "facilitate a broad knowledge of the institution and the services it offers; motivate public participation in the activities it promotes and encourage the use of services; strengthen and consolidate the "museum-public" relationship (Ballart & Tresseras 2005, p. 191).

It was in this perspective that ICOM defined communication as one of the museum's primary functions, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Museums, in addition to conserving and producing knowledge, through research, "communicate and exhibit the material and intangible heritage

of humanity and its surroundings, for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (ICOM, 2007; ICOM – Nederland, 2020). From the collection to the exhibition, "through research, activities and the building itself, the museum has a dynamic that establishes communication between it and its audiences" (Remelgado, 2014, p. 118). This definition of museum and its communicative functions was deepened in 2019, with the aim of making the museum accessible to all, more participatory and more attractive. In 2019, ICOM defined that

Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality, and planetary wellbeing" (ICOM – Nederland, 2020).

The use of the new communication means provided by the Internet, such as specialized websites, social networks, or smartphone app's, is fundamental for the museum's communication strategies in the 21st century, to make them truly participatory institutions. These new technologies and interactive communication means allow a constant dialogue between the museum and the public, constituting the "stage where society expresses its opinions and where there is a more participatory action, not only with other users, but also with cultural institutions" (Almeida, 2022, p. 18-19). Thus, according to Almeida (2022), the use of social networks encourages society to actively contribute to the shared construction of the content, but also increases its involvement with the museum institution by developing a closer and more direct relationship, where the user speaks and expresses their opinion and in return receives a response from the institution. The development of this proximity between the public and the museum allows to this one "not only to know its audience and their interests, but also what they would like to see in the museum, in this way the institution can try to work towards meeting the expectations of the public" (Almeida, 2022, p. 19).

The increase in two-way and interactive dialogue, provided by this type of communication, is a way to combat various reasons that, historically, have kept citizens away from the museums, as well as the emergence of fierce criticism throughout history, as we have already mentioned. Defining a participatory cultural institution as "a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around the content" (Simon, 2010, p. ii), Simon (2010) states that the reasons for the distancing of citizens from museums range from cultural institutions irrelevance to their life, the institution never changes, the authoritative voice of the institution doesn't include the visitors or give him the context for understanding what's presented, the institution is not a creative place where the citizen can express they self and contribute to history, science and art, the institution is not a comfortable social place to the visitor to talk about ideas with friends and strangers (Simon, 2010).

In the Portuguese case, the importance of the communication in museums was recognized and politically assumed in 2004. The Law No. 47/2004, of 19 August, which approved the Framework Law on the Portuguese Museums, establishes as one of the fundamental principles of the national museums policy, among others, the "Principle of information, through the systematic collection and dissemination of data on museums and cultural heritage, in order to allow in a timely manner the widest possible dissemination and exchange of knowledge, at the national and the international level" (Princípios da Política Museológica, 2004).

The dissemination and participation in linked information through new information and communication media and technologies is at the center of the current museum's activity, also in Portugal. To bring citizens closer to the museums, "the online presence of the institutions is fundamental, and different platforms can be used, with different characteristics and different functionalities, with the website being one of the most common resources" (Remelgado, 2014, p. 44). Given the importance of the World Wide Web currently, we considered it relevant to diagnose the presence of Portuguese national museums on the various platforms provided by the Internet, such as websites, smartphone apps, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. We chose to focus on the national museums, since the modern museums are closely related to the construction of the national

communities and their narratives. We checked the existence of 28 national museums (table 1). Of this total, 28.6% do not have a basic communication tool, such as the website, and almost all of them don't have smartphone app (82%). On the other hand, the presence on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or Facebook does not require large investments or more in-depth technical knowledge. This factor can explain the massive presence of the Portuguese national museums on these three platforms. Thus, only 13.8% of the national museums do not have a YouTube channel, while they are all present on both Instagram and Facebook. The last two platforms, reaching virtually billions of people, like the others, are the simplest and most intuitive platforms from a technical point of view.

Table 1. Presence of Portugal's national museums on the internet and on the smartphones

Museum name	Locality	Web site	Smartphone app	YouTube	Instagram	Facebook
Museum of Ancient Art	Lisbon	http://www.museudearteantiga.pt/	SC Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga	MNAA-M. Nacional de Arte Antiga	@mnaa_lisboa	Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga
Soare's dos Reis Museum	Porto	https://mnsr.museumonumentos.pt.pt/	There is none	Museu N. Soares dos Reis	@museunacionalsoaresdosreis	Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis
Museum of the Abbot of Baçal	Bragança	https://www.museuabadebacal.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu do Abade de Baçal	@museuabadebacal	Museu do Abade de Baçal
Royal Treasure Museum	Lisbon	https://www.tesouroreal.pt/	There is none	Museu Tesouro Real	@museutesouroreal	Museu do Tesouro Real
D. Diogo de Sousa Archaeology Museum	Braga	https://www.museuuddiogodesousa.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu de Arqueologia D. Diogo de Sousa	@museuddiogodesousa	Museu de Arqueologia D. Diogo Sousa
Tile Museum	Lisbon	http://www.museudoazulejo.gov.pt/	Museu do Azulejo	Museu Nacional do Azulejo	@museunazulejo	Museu Nacional do Azulejo
Biscaínhos Museum	Braga	https://museudosbiscainhos.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu dos Biscaínhos	@museudosbiscainhos	Museu dos Biscaínhos
Doctor Anastácio Gonçalves House-Museum	Lisbon	There is none	There is none	There is none	@cmanastaciogoncalves	Casa-Museu Anastácio Gonçalves
Ceramics Museum	Caldas da Rainha	There is none	There is none	Museu da Cerâmica das C. Rainha	@museudaceramica	Museu da Cerâmica
Chiado Museum of Contemporary Art	Lisbon	http://www.museuartecontemporanea.gov.pt/	There is none	MNAC	@mnac.oficial	Museu de Arte Contemporânea
Coach Museum	Lisbon	http://museudoscoches.gov.pt/pt/	Museu dos Coches	Museu Nacional dos Coches	@museudoscoches	Museu N. dos Coches
Museum of the Dukes of Bragança Palace	Guimarães	There is none	There is none	Canal do Paço dos Duques	@pacodosduques	Castelo de Guimarães Paço dos Duques
Museum of Ethnology	Lisbon	https://mnetnologia.wordpress.com/	There is none	M. N. Etnologia	Museu N. Etnologia	Museu N. de Etnologia
Proença Junior Museum	Castelo Branco	There is none	There is none	There is none	@mftpj	Museu F. T. Proença Júnior

Grão Vasco Museum	Viseu	https://www.museunacionalgraovas.co.gov.pt/	There is none	There is none	@museunacionalgraovasco	Museu Nacional Grão Vasco
Guarda Museum	Guarda	https://museudaguarda.pt/	C. Histórico do Milénio	Museu da Guarda	@museu_da_guarda	Museu da Guarda
José Malhoa Museum	Caldas da Rainha	There is none	There is none	Museu José Malhoa	@museu.josemalhoa	Museu José Malhoa
Museum of Lamego	Lamego	https://museudelamego.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu de Lamego	@museudelamego	Museu de Lamego
Machado de Castro Museum	Coimbra	There is none	There is none	Museu N. Machado de Castro	@museunacionalmachadodecastro	Museu N. Machado de Castro
Museum of Conímbriga	Coimbra	https://www.conimbriga.pt/guias2	There is none	Museu N. de Conímbriga	@museu_nac_conimbriga	Museu N. de Conímbriga
Alberto Sampaio Museum	Guimarães	https://www.museualbertosampaio.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu de Alberto Sampaio	@museudealbertosampaio	Museu de Alberto Sampaio
Museum of Archaeology	Lisbon	https://www.museunacionalarqueologia.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu Nacional de Arqueologia	@mnarqueologia	Museu Nacional de Arqueologia
Museum of the Press, J. and Graphic Arts	Porto	https://www.museudaimprensa.pt/	There is none	Museu da Imprensa	@museunacionaldaimprensa	Museu Nacional da Imprensa
Music Museum	Lisbon	https://www.museunacionaldamusica.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu Nacional da Música	@museunacionaldamusica	Museu Nacional da Música
Museum of the Theatre and Dance	Lisbon	There is none	There is none	There is none	@mnateatroedanca	Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança
Museum of Miranda	Miranda do Douro	https://www.museueterrademiranda.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu da Terra de Miranda	@museudatterrademiranda	Museu da Terra de Miranda
Costume Museum	Lisbon	There is none	Museu do Traje	Museu N. do Traje	@museunacionaldotraje	Museu Nacional do Traje
Resistance and Freedom Museum	Peniche	https://www.museunacionalresistenciae-liberdade-peniche.gov.pt/	There is none	Museu Nacional Resistência e Liberdade	@mnrl_fortaleza_peniche	Museu Nacional Resistência e Liberdade

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

In addition, the tools provided by information and communication new technologies and means, like those mentioned above, are particularly useful, insofar as the "online presence can be a vehicle for dissemination for museums that, due to the various circumstances, are closed to the public, stimulating a relationship between the museum and its audiences and allowing the institution's mission and objectives, despite the evident limitations, they are complied with" (Remelgado, 2014, p. 48).

In addition to restoration or conservation works that may cause the closure of museums, a particular emphasis should be given to their closure in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period of mandatory confinement around the world, museums, like other cultural institutions, closed for several months, becoming physically inaccessible. The number of visitors to the 100 most visited museums in the world fell "from 230 million in 2019, the last full pre-pandemic year, to just 54m in 2020. Since then, we have seen a slow recovery, with 71m visitors in 2021 and 141m in 2022" (The Art Newspaper, 2024).

Without the possibility of physical visits, the Internet has provided virtual visits as well as closer interaction between citizens and museums through its platforms. In this context, the pandemic has renewed the importance of the world wide web, as a fundamental tool for the museum communication. The growth of virtual visits to the museums has been exponential, and it was demonstrated by a survey developed by the European Network of Museum Organizations, which found that despite the doors

being closed, visitors continued to enter through all screens (in museums). Some museums have seen online visits grow by 500% (Soares, 2020).

According to Soares (2020), "more than 60% of the European museums have increased their online presence since they had to close their doors due to the social distancing measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The overwhelming majority (94.6%) even hired specialized personnel, despite the budget for this type of activities having grown by just over 13%".

In this context, it is urgent to ask ourselves whether it still makes sense for museums to keep their doors open to physical visits, since most of them allow virtual visits. Basically, will these virtual tours replace physical visits to the museums.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies (Styliani et al., 2009) demonstrated that viewing content made available online by museums could constitute a motivation for a physical visit to the museum, noting that a "research has revealed that 70% of people visiting a museum website would subsequently be more likely to go and visit the 'real' museum" (p. 524). In this way, as Styliani et al. (2009) states,

virtual museums cannot and do not intend to replace the walled museums. They can be characterized as 'digital reflections' of physical museums that do not exist per se but act complementarily to become an-extension of physical museums exhibition halls and the ubiquitous vehicle of the ideas, concepts and 'messages' of the real museum. Their primary aim is (or should be) to investigate and propose models for the exploration of the real purpose and conceptual orientation of a museum (Styliani et al., 2009, p. 527).

The museums virtual visitors consider the website and other internet platforms such as social media, as complements to the physical experience of the visit, as a pre-preparation rather than a substitute for them (Barry, 2006). Virtual tours will never replace the intercultural experiences that physical encounters provide, both to the visitors and to the museums, despite being an excellent business card to the museum, arousing the interest and curiosity of the citizen for the real trip to the museum. In short, and as Remelgado (2014) pointed out,

the museums online presence cannot be understood as a factor of constraint to the achievement of the museum objectives, namely regarding the number of visitors, but rather as a communication instrument that, when properly structured, unquestionably contributes to strengthening the relationship between the museum and its audiences, not only in the virtual context, but also as visitors to the physical space" (Remelgado, 2014, p. 49).

The successive confinements, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have increased the financial availability of the individuals, having awakened, at the same time, an even greater desire to travel and to get to know different cultural institutions. There was, therefore, an increase in the number of visitors to museums, between the years 2021 and 2023, which equaled or exceeded pre-pandemic levels in the last year. In the annual survey carried out by The Art Newspaper, in the 100 most visited museums in the world, it was revealed on March 17, 2024: that "international museum attendance figures back to pre-pandemic levels" (The Art Newspaper, 2024), and that "in 2023, many of the world's major museums equaled—or surpassed—their 2019 attendance figures. ..." (The Art Newspaper, 2024). The Art Newspaper gives examples such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which welcomed around 2.7 million people in both 2019 and 2023, the National Museum of Scotland, which also reached 2.2 million in both years, and the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) which exceeded 2.8 million visitors in 2023, 2% more than in 2018, as it was closed to the public 6 months of 2019, for renovations.

Five years after the lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the return to the normal life has once again increased physical visits to the museums. It is therefore possible to see significant increases in the number of physical visits to the museums around the world, following the trends of an increasing global tourism.

4. Conclusions

Communication, having been a hallmark of the museum since its origins, was externalized and assumed prominence from the Second World War, with the emergence of large transnational institutions such as UNESCO or ICOM.

As educational institutions, it is the museums responsibility to convey messages, feelings, and emotions of belonging to communities and social groups through their exhibitions. Initially, signs and symbols were attributed to the museum building as well as to its objects, by the political, economic, and cultural elites. These elites had a vision of the world and society, which was not necessarily coincident with that of most of the population that made up a given community or social class. Appropriated by these elites and transformed into weapons of power for the access to knowledge they provided, museums have suffered deep criticism throughout their history, having to reinvent themselves to involve the communities they were supposed to represent.

From instruments that materialized power and affirmation of new and old groups and social classes in the Renaissance, such as the nobility or a commercial bourgeoisie, they were appropriated by the political powers that emerged from the French Revolution to give substance to the idea of national community. The intention expressed by these politicians was to use certain objects that would serve to testify and legitimize the existence of a nation inhabited by equal, fraternal, and free citizens before the constitution.

Throughout the twentieth century, the emergence of large transnational institutions redefined communication as one of the main objectives of museums as participatory entities.

On the other hand, the massification of new technologies and means of communication, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, provided the development of the communicative function of museums. They have made their digitized collections available to billions of people around the world. At the same time, the platforms provided by the Internet have increased the participation of citizens in the museum's life and activity, through interactive communication.

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