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Addressing Sustainability in Portuguese Museums and Heritage: The Role of Cultural Policies

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Abstract: The Future Museums Project Group was created under the Portuguese Ministry of Culture with the mission of proposing recommendations for a 10-year public policy for museums, palaces, and monuments, considering sustainability, accessibility, and innovation issues and their relevance in society. Against this background, museums were understood as agents of change with a role to play in achieving a more sustainable future, and culture as a fundamental pillar for democracy and sustainable development. This study discusses the findings of the project, focusing on three features that highlight the approach adopted to sustainability, which included collections management, participation, and mediation. Drawn from empirical research, a series of concrete recommendations, both for policy makers and museums, are discussed. The study concludes by arguing that cultural policies must place sustainability at the core of their strategy in order to function as a framework to drive and implement sustainable development practices in museums and heritage. Furthermore, within the scope of post-pandemic recovery plans, climate emergency, and the energy crisis, it is even more pressing that cultural policies provide support for museums and heritage and ensure that they have the conditions and resources to be able to move forward in a more integrated manner, thus contributing to a sustainable future.

Keywords: cultural heritage; national museums; sustainability; sustainable development; cultural policies; climate action; Portugal



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1. Introduction

The term sustainability has become a part of everyday vocabulary and is now a trending topic. As is the case with many other terms, sustainability may be used to transmit different meanings and is often a blurred concept related to multiple dimensions ranging from the economy or the environment to social issues. In this study, sustainability is understood as the pursuit of a better future, which is only possible by addressing sustainable development practices from the different but interconnected challenging dimensions of a cultural, environmental, economic, and social nature, to which museums and heritage can make relevant contributions.

Over recent decades, museums have been tackling sustainability issues. In fact, the economic factor involved in museums' development (and their survival in a subsequent crisis) has emerged as a hot topic of debate in a period marked by dwindling funding [1], addressing issues such as management models, funding, and the impact on cities and urban planning [2]. It also includes envisioning museums and heritage as a source of sustainable development in more local settings [3,4]. On the other hand, neither environmental challenges nor the social dimension have been dismissed by museums [5–7]. Indeed, discussions around the social role of museums in society can be traced back to the 1970s and are part of today's global agenda [8]. Inequalities, human rights, social justice, gender and identity, well-being, and inclusion, to mention a few challenges, have become part of many

museums' practices [9,10] as part of their mandate in the service to society's development. At the same time, by addressing important themes that affect society, the relevant role of museums in society is enhanced. However, it may be said that, in general, sustainability has been addressed by museums in a fragmented or compartmentalized manner, lacking a more integrated approach to connect all the dimensions of sustainability [11].

Museums' commitment to approaching sustainability more holistically is a recent development. It is worth mentioning the input of Ibermuseos as a relevant platform for Ibero-American museums, which created a line of action in 2014 dedicated to sustainability and covered all four of the cultural, social, economic, and environmental dimensions (see [12]). With the aim of offering the almost 10,000 museum institutions in Ibero-America a diagnostic tool to identify the degree of sustainability of their institutions, since 2021, Ibermuseos has concentrated its efforts on the collaborative development of a Sustainability Self-Assessment Guide, presented in 2023.

In such a holistic approach to sustainability, the work conducted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in recent years is also relevant. ICOM's efforts to mainstream sustainability in museums' work are evident in the establishment of a working group on sustainability in 2018. The Group's mission endorses the role of museums in addressing the global political agenda for sustainable development [13]. This involves encouraging museums to contribute towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda [14] and the Paris Climate Change Agreement [15], both adopted in 2015. In view of culture's somewhat marginal status in the 2030 Agenda [16,17], since the SDGs are organized around the three main traditional pillars, namely the environment, society, and the economy, its relevance in the implementation of the Agenda has been highlighted. In fact, more recently, several publications have drawn the attention of many SDGs (e.g., [18–21]) to the contributions of culture, including museums and heritage. This is also evident in the recent efforts observed on the part of ICOM. The resolution "On sustainability and the implementation of Agenda 2030, Transforming our World" was adopted by the General Assembly at the ICOM General Conference 2019 in Kyoto. It emphasized the role of museums in actively incorporating sustainability into their programs, partnerships, and operations, but also in reshaping their values, missions, and strategies towards a sustainable future, considering the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda as a framework to follow [22]. Moreover, adding the term "sustainability" to the new ICOM museum definition in 2022 is also symptomatic of ICOM's commitment.

Portugal has incorporated the 2030 Agenda into national policies and identified priorities [23]. However, the role of culture in contributing to the SDGs is still only regarded as a potential channel [24,25] and is not deemed a priority. As for public policies related to museums, the first legal document to acknowledge the museum's role and responsibilities in addressing the 2030 Agenda dates back to 2019, namely the Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 35 [26]. In this context, museums are understood as agents of change with a role to play in creating a more sustainable future and culture as a fundamental pillar for democracy and sustainable development. The aforementioned legal document established the Future Museums Project Group, under the Ministry of Culture, with the mission of identifying and proposing recommendations for a 10-year public policy for museums, palaces, and monuments (MPMs), considering sustainability, accessibility, and innovation issues and their relevance in society. As a result of this government initiative, a strategic thinking process needed to be set in motion to prepare and adapt museums (and heritage institutions) for present and future transformations in society. It is important to note that the creation of this Project Group is an unprecedented government initiative in the public policies for heritage and museums in Portugal in the context of a strategic (and participative) reflection on the future and development of the sector.

This study discusses some of the findings of the Future Museums Project Group report [27], focusing on three main strands that evidence an approach to sustainability: collections management, participation, education, and mediation. We argue that these strands underline the diverse and interconnected ways in which sustainability is linked to

museum work and the future of museums. On the other hand, we also claim that museums and heritage are relevant actors in society, providing multidimensional solutions to achieve a more sustainable future and help address climate change, which this study will confirm. In such context, cultural policies have a key role by placing sustainability at the core of their strategy in order to function as a framework to drive and implement sustainable development practices (and goals) in museums and heritage.

2. Context, Approaches, and Methods

The Future Museums Project Group (2019–2021) was based on a predetermined sample, namely the 37 MPMs under the direct management of the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC, the central government body responsible for national museums, national palaces, and monuments on the UNESCO World Heritage List), and the Regional Directorates for Culture (DRCs)¹. It represented a diverse set of museum and heritage institutions, not only in terms of collections, infrastructures, and resources but also of geographic locations. Although the scope of the project group was restricted to the museums of the Ministry of Culture, the Group decided to extend its proposals to the universe of the 165 accredited museums that make up the Portuguese Museum Network.

The responsibilities assigned to the Future Museums Project Group were wide-ranging, covering the scope of activity of MPMs and most of the museum functions set forth in the Framework Law on Portuguese Museums (2004). In the establishment of recommendations for MPMs over a 10-year period (up to 2030), the work was organized and developed around five main (interconnected) themes: management, networks and partnerships, digital transformation, collection management, and audience engagement.

The empirical research was predominantly qualitative. When developing our methodological approach to support the design of recommendations for the future planning of MPMs, the need for three complementary research fronts became evident: firstly, the identification of trends and changing factors in society with an impact on museums and cultural heritage, considering society's view of the museum and heritage sector, which included a literature review and analysis of international institutional documents; secondly, data collection, in particular internal statistical data from the DGPC and DRCs in order to develop an Excel database and indicators (e.g., collections, visitors, human resources, revenue, and expenditure) to characterize the reality of the MPMs under analysis. Additionally, a questionnaire survey of the MPMs' collection storage was administered due to the lack of available data regarding this specific area, enabling a diagnosis from which several recommendations were proposed in the area of collection management; thirdly, a significant strand of qualitative data was collected from the professional sector, involving approximately 30 in-depth interviews (semi-structured), which were mainly face-to-face, with MPM directors, DGPC managers, and national and international experts. Interviews were key to involving the community of professionals in the discussion regarding the future of museums and heritage, as well as their perception and interpretation of the priorities and potential ways forward. In addition, the work included observation and field visits to MPMs to evaluate their operating conditions, helping to consolidate information about the current situation of the MPMs. Professional organizations were also consulted during the project. Several meetings with key leading professional organizations were held in the project's first phase. Furthermore, the preliminary report presented by the Project Group (July 2020) was followed by a period of public consultation to gather contributions, namely from the Portuguese Association of Museology, ICOM Portugal, ICOMOS Portugal, and Access to Culture, as well as individual inputs from culture professionals.

The complementarity of the various research fronts and methods made combining field knowledge and the prospective dimension possible, thereby bringing new issues to the forefront and promoting the discussion of potential ways forward for national museums and heritage.

3. Results

3.1. Sustainability and the Future of Museums Report

The findings of the Future Museums Project Group rank sustainability as one of the main trends and changing factors in society with an impact on museums and cultural heritage, along with trust and well-being, changes in demographics, tourism, digital technologies, and participation. It addresses a vision of sustainability that encompasses the environmental, social, economic, and cultural dimensions, including the commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda framework. Indeed, this perspective focuses on more responsible management, implying changes in museums' practices and operations. Several key points are identified in this prospective view. A sustainable museum will be sensitive to the impact of its visitors on the environment, will manage collections in order to enhance them for future generations, and will contribute responsibly to the social, cultural, environmental, and economic vitality of the location in which it is housed. It will also develop long-term strategic planning, collaborating with other museums and organizations in partnerships and networks. Furthermore, the sustainability of museums will increasingly depend on their ability to influence the quality of life of their visitors.

Sustainability is embedded in the final recommendations report of the Future Museums Project Group [27] from a cross-sectional perspective, based on the assumption that sustainability is relevant for almost all areas of museum work and should be approached in an integrated manner. For the purposes of this study, three strands highlighting the multiple interfaces between sustainability and museum practice will be analyzed in detail in the following section: collections management, participation, and education and mediation.

3.2. Collections Management for Sustainable Growth

Collecting, as a museum function, entails an impulse for museums' continuous growth and accumulation. However, in a time characterized by the profusion of heritage, there appears to be an imbalance between the objects to be preserved and the real possibility of preserving them [28]. Envisioning sustainability in museums also calls into question the idea of the unlimited growth of collections which has prevailed in the world of museums [11,29]. Two issues are intertwined in this discussion. On the one hand, there is a need for an active and sustainable collection policy—involving the revision of criteria, assessment, and rationalization with a view to developing (responsible) collections—and, on the other hand, the issue of adequate, efficient, and sustainable storage.

As regards storage through the lens of sustainability, the approach is twofold. Firstly, the need to envisage storage that ensures the protection and preservation of museum objects, considering sustainable growth. Secondly, the need to implement energy-efficient storage facilities, thus reducing the negative effect on the environment [11] without compromising conservation requirements.

In the Museum of the Future project, the collection policy and storage issues were among the topics addressed in relation to the main area of collections management. A collection policy is mandatory under the Portuguese museum law [30] (art. 12), is required for museum accreditation, and should be reviewed at least every five years. Following the enforcement of the law, each national museum drew up a collection strategy; however, as revealed by our research, these criteria, methodologies, and procedures need to be reviewed, and collections management for sustainable growth still requires further reflection. This implies highly selective collecting—the objects to be kept for the future taking the collections' coherence and growth into consideration, which varies from museum to museum—and entails a range of possibilities [28]. In addition, it may include a discussion on what the museum no longer wishes to keep, which may involve different procedures (e.g., transfer, long-term loan, donation, exchange, among others) and (creative) approaches to redistributing, reusing, and recycling objects [31]. Indeed, deaccession is controversial and challenging from an ethical standpoint [32] but may serve as a tool for collection development [33–35]. Internationally, it has gained visibility, leading to more open discussions; however, to date, there is no evidence of significant changes in collection

development practice [36]. Also, deaccession is considered mostly as a last resort [36]. In the meantime, these challenges remain for many museums: full storages with collections that (may) reveal inconsistent collecting, redundancy and gaps, and the need to focus on sustainable and responsible deaccession practices.

Deaccession in Portuguese museums is traditionally viewed as an exception and is only foreseen in cases of the “removal from the inventory” of an object. These particular cases are framed by circumstances of irreparable damage, usually caused by accident and always accompanied by a well-documented and self-regulated report issued by the supervising authority. The theme has received little attention in academic discussions and in practice and, to some extent, has become a taboo [37,38]. Addressing collections management for sustainable growth offers an opportunity to further discuss different approaches based on an informed debate that encourages critical reflection, assessment, and an integrated and strategic view involving museums and policymakers.

In order to obtain an overview of the current situation regarding storage in MPMs, the Group undertook a survey in partnership with the Portuguese Observatory of Cultural Activities (OPAC). It was broadly acknowledged that many of these institutions were experiencing storage constraints, but a full assessment of these implications was lacking. In fact, this was the first survey to map the storage situation in MPMs. The survey was designed to assess storage conditions from a quantitative but also a qualitative perspective, including the following features: collections, accessibility, object circulation, management, premises, and equipment [39].

The design of the survey was inspired by and adapted from the *Self-Evaluation Tool for Collections in Storage* of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCRUM) [40]. The survey was mainly quantitative, asking 48 questions. The questions are generally closed, with predefined, dichotomous, or multiple-answer options. To collect additional observations, an open question was included at the end of the questionnaire, which was particularly useful for a more qualitative dimension [39].²

The survey was distributed to the 33 MPMs that had storage facilities in January 2020 via email and using the Qualtrics electronic platform. It should be noted that the first version of the survey was previously tested in three organizations in the sample: *Palácio Nacional de Mafra* (National Palace of Mafra), *Museu Nacional dos Coches* (National Coach Museum), and *Mosteiro de Alcobaça* (Monastery of Alcobaça). We received responses from all 33 MPMs participating in the survey. In total, this sample of 33 MPMs represents over 1.3 million objects. The responses are from people in museums, palaces, and monuments who hold a large range of roles and who have been dealing with collections in various ways: directors, other museum staff, department coordinators, conservators, and heads of storage. The data collected were analyzed using Excel and SPSS software [39].

The findings show that, on average, 97% of the collections are in storage facilities, with the remaining 3% on permanent display. While challenging, these figures are not entirely surprising, highlighting a trend for many museums elsewhere (see [41,42]). However, one can identify very different situations in this global assessment considering the diversity of the organizations represented in our sample. For example, the *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga* (National Museum of Ancient Art) exhibits around 20% of its collections in a permanent display. As for the *Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança* (National Museum of Theatre and Dance)—a museum with predominantly document collections—it only displays 0.1% of its collections, and for a house museum like the *Museu dos Biscainhos* (Biscainhos Museum), all the collections are on display.

In MPMs, the heterogeneity of situations regarding storage areas is also evident. While there are examples of acceptable situations and practices, a number of difficulties have also been identified. One of the features that characterize this panorama is that many of these institutions are housed in historical buildings that frequently fail to provide optimum storage conditions. Furthermore, the survey results show that around two-thirds of the respondents consider the furniture and equipment adequate, but the figure falls to only a

third as far as the suitability of the materials used in their construction and their resistance to infestations are concerned. In some of the surveyed institutions, a lack of planning is observable, e.g., in preventive conservation, the absence of plans prioritizing conservation interventions, both for collections and building maintenance, and a lack of risk management plans. Due to insufficient human resources, in several cases, there are no designated heads for the storage facilities. Also, half of the organizations claimed not to have any specific standards in place. Taken together, the findings highlight a problematic state of the art, reflecting a disinvestment in the sector that has lasted many years, both financially and technically, and in terms of human resources. In fact, inadequate storage is a critical and global issue affecting the world of museums that has been regularly observed from 1934 to the present day [43].

The current situation regarding storage requires the urgent attention of policy makers, as underlined by the Future Museums Project Group. This involves planning and short-term intervention by improving infrastructures and equipment and by reinforcing teams in terms of preventive conservation. As far as MPMs are concerned, this also means focusing on reorganization in order to maximize the available space, reviewing preventive conservation plans, as well as safety plans (followed by regular professional training), and implementing a risk analysis and management methodology in all the buildings and facilities. The Framework Law on Portuguese Museums (2004) requires the implementation of preventive conservation standards (art. 28) and a safety plan (art. 33) in museums. In some national museums, these standards and plans require reviewing and updating. Also, since national monuments are not fully covered by museum law, such standards and plans do not exist and, therefore, should be prepared with the necessary adaptations. Considering sustainability, a reorientation of investment in preventive conservation, security, and risk management would ensure safer conditions for objects and prevent decay factors, therefore reducing unnecessary future costs with onerous restoration operations.

Additionally, the survey findings point to a critical situation, e.g., overcrowded and insufficient storage space. In fact, for one-third of the MPMs, it is no longer possible to accommodate new objects in the storage facilities. This situation has led to objects being stored in undifferentiated or inappropriate spaces as a temporary solution. These findings underline the need for an urgent framework plan for new storage facilities that preserve national heritage in optimal conditions in terms of conservation and safety and consider sustainable growth. A subsequent recommendation of the Future Museums Project Group is to consider storage mutualization addressing long-term planning, an approach that has not been established in the Portuguese museum landscape but has been developed in other countries. One example of this model is the offsite shared storage facility in Quebec, inaugurated in 2005 for two national museums—*la Réserve Muséale de la Capitale Nationale/Centre National de Conservation et d'études des Collections* [44] and the shared storage facility in Nancy for five museums (since 2013). Other examples come from the Netherlands, Norway, and Poland (see [45]), to name just a few.

Storage mutualization involves offsite storage sharing by several institutions and entails more efficient processes of managing shared resources: costs, equipment, and human resources. Additionally, conceiving (new) shared storage facilities represents an opportunity to design energy-efficient buildings, thus reducing the environmental impact.

As addressed by the Future Museums Project Group, shared storage facilities could also serve as study centers for research, constituting strategic clusters for the enhancement of cultural heritage in the territory, as demonstrated by several international examples. In recent years, an increasing number of museums have externalized their storage facilities by creating autonomous collection centers for preservation and research. The Centre for Conservation and Resources (2013) of the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (MuCEM) in Marseille, the Louvre's Center for Conservation in Liévin (2019), and the Depot of the Museum Boijmans van Beunigen (2021) in Rotterdam are examples of such cases.

This is particularly relevant for a holistic understanding of sustainability, considering the 2030 Agenda—namely SDG Goal 9.5 on the enhancement of research and innovation. In this regard, such future collection centers could represent valuable resources for scientific research, thus contributing to the needs of present and future researchers [19].

Making storage more ecologically sustainable can also be achievable to some degree by supporting the digitization of collections, thereby decreasing the need to handle objects so frequently [5,11]. One of the main themes the Future Museums Project Group addressed was digital transformation, understood as a cross-cutting measure putting technologies at the service of integrated management of MPMs. One key recommendation is to develop a program for the systematic reinforcement of collections' digitization, with a two-dimensional reproduction of documents and images and a three-dimensional reproduction of objects and buildings using 3D technology. Despite some progress in this field, it continues to be an underdeveloped area that requires further investment [46]. An image does not entirely replace the physical object, but for the purposes of research and information management, access to documentation and object images through structured databases tends to reduce the need to visit the object in storage. In this context, it contributes to the care and protection of collections and, to some extent, to a reduction in energy consumption [5].

The survey on the storage conditions in MPMs has provided a relevant diagnosis of the situation for each of the parameters surveyed, allowing us to identify recommendations and measures to be prioritized in the following years by public policies. Nevertheless, a follow-up step could focus on a more detailed analysis, enabling the classification of the sample on a scale of more and less satisfactory situations (e.g., excellent, good, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory) that takes into account a wide range of variables with a view to formulating recommendations for each MPM, which requires identifying the most relevant variables and indicators, e.g., the most discriminating ones, in each dimension [39].

3.3. Integrating a Participatory Culture and Reinforcing Heritage and Museums' Social Impact

Participation, as a mechanism that facilitates the construction of new forms of engagement and the sharing of responsibilities in decision-making with a view to improving public action, is relevant for achieving sustainability, e.g., the construction of a better future, collectively. The 2030 Agenda, in particular, SDG 16.7, which calls for institutions to enable responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making, is worthy of note. Indeed, participation has been the object of growing interest in the implementation of public policies for culture [47]. In this regard, "participation may be understood as a "challenge to" and goal for democratization" [48] (p. 29), as well as for cultural democracy (see [49]).³

As argued by the Future Museums Project Group, museums, as civic spaces of knowledge, culture, and learning, can contribute by setting in motion constructive and collective public participation processes in programming (and other areas), not only in the sense of democratizing access to "high culture", but also of cultural democracy, i.e., access to the full range of cultural expressions. Additionally, a more participatory cultural approach in museum activities can play an important role in the governance of MPMs and enhance their social engagement. In general, participatory projects still play a marginal role in Portuguese museums, although they are considered a promising trend to be developed [48]. Indeed, one of the Future Museums Project Group recommendations consisted of establishing community consultation groups in each MPM to encourage these institutions to reach out and form new relationships with audiences and extend networks. These consultation groups should be composed of members of the community representing different social, economic, educational, and cultural areas, bringing together disparate people, ideas, and institutions.

The most recent history of museums has been marked by a paradigm shift signaling the transformation and redefinition of an institution considered elitist and exclusive towards the construction of a socially responsible institution at the service of the public [50]. Here, sustainability is also a key reference since it recalls a commitment to overcome inequalities (social, economic, and cultural, among others) in the access to museums. The

latest survey on museum visitors in Portuguese national museums [51] has confirmed that the predominant social profile in all these museums, despite the specific nature of each, is that of qualified audiences in terms of education and socio-professional activity, often with previous visiting habits, mostly female, adult, and Caucasian. Generally, the data reinforce the idea that these museums are not representing society in its diversity. This means that the commitment to expanding audience diversity requires significant investment (e.g., resources and teams) in addressing persisting barriers to fully activating the museum's role in education and mediation towards audience development and reinforcing museums' social impact.

The Future Museums Project Group findings also stress the role of MPMs in promoting active citizenship. From this perspective, heritage and museum education and mediation represent both a means and an instrument with significant potential to raise public awareness regarding sustainable practices and to support positive change. In this respect, museums as learning sites can create opportunities to activate discussions around sustainability through their programs and activities, thereby reaching diverse audiences. Furthermore, museums can lead by example and inspire their audiences by bringing sustainability to a strategic level, to policies, and to shared values but also to the level of operations, which means implementing sustainable practices in building functioning (e.g., greener operations) and in daily museum practice, thus reducing the adverse impacts on the environment. In Europe, a number of museums have taken the lead by placing sustainability at the core of their practices and strategies, namely in terms of environmental sustainability. The Rijksmuseum [52] and the Tate [53] are such cases, among others. Therefore, museums can activate their soft power [54], their ability to influence public opinion, and inspire visitors towards positive change. As places of influence and certainty, regarded among the most trusted organizations and sources of reliable information, as shown by research in the USA [55]⁴, museums can play a significant role in disseminating scientific information—to some extent bridging the gap between science and society and tackling disinformation—but also in contributing to raising awareness and promoting action for sustainability and climate action.

4. Discussion and Conclusions: Cross-Cutting Policies for Sustainability

The creation of the Future Museums Project Group may be understood as an unprecedented government initiative in Portugal's public heritage and museum policies since it embodied reflection and strategic thinking for the sector with the involvement of the professional community. It is worth mentioning that in the past, strategic planning for the sector has been insufficient and discontinuous [57] and with little involvement from the sector. On the other hand, it has been argued that a new cycle of growth in cultural policies has been observed since 2019 [58]. However, low government commitment may also be noted in the incorporation of the Group's recommendations into concrete policy measures, in particular, as regards the role of museums towards a more sustainable future and culture as a fundamental pillar for democracy and sustainable development. Nevertheless, it is important to mention the adoption of most of the proposals relating to the transformation of the Portuguese Museums Network that were integrated into the reflections of a specific working group and into subsequent government policies.

Our analysis confirms that in Portuguese national policies, museums (and culture) do not make an active contribution to achieving the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. The same could be argued regarding the national climate policy, which is disconnected from the cultural government area. Note that on another scale, the European Green Deal (2019) did not initially integrate cultural heritage (and museums) agencies and contributions to climate action, which justified lobbying for it with the publication of the "European Cultural Heritage Green Paper" [59] to advocate for the key role of cultural heritage in achieving the ambitions of this European agreement and strategy.

This gap between Portuguese cultural policies and other government areas, e.g., climate policies, which to some extent is related to a more traditional policy compartmen-

talization practice, is consistent with other recent research findings. In 2021, the report *Culture: The Missing Link to Climate Action* [60] analyzed national cultural policies from several countries worldwide and concluded that, in most cases, cultural policies are not aligned with climate science and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Also, a recent survey on how European museums are dealing with the climate crisis [61] emphasizes that the absence of a policy framework and coherence between government and funding bodies is a barrier to addressing environmental issues in the museum sector. Thus, the need to increase communication between governing areas is crucial [61]. In response, we argue for cross-cutting policies for sustainability and climate action that acknowledge the role of culture, heritage, and museums in that endeavor, taking coordinated action to reduce environmental impact.

A more active role of national cultural policies in positioning cultural organizations towards sustainability and climate change is important to guide action [16] and to empower the museum and heritage sector with the required support and resources [61,62], including accountability. This involves providing a framework to support museums' development in adopting a more integrated approach to sustainability in their practice. At the museum level, several recommendations discussed throughout the study point to some of the ways sustainability can be addressed, e.g., collections management, participation, education, and mediation, considering our case study.

Another possible line of action for public policy is to support sustainable practices in museums and heritage buildings, e.g., "green" operations, ensuring sustainability principles, regulation, and reporting, with the goal of reducing the environmental impact. In that way, it ensures Portugal's commitments to climate change targets and pathways are aligned with the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the UN Agenda 2030.

This study has sought to discuss the findings and recommendations of the Future Museums Project Group for a 10-year public policy in MPMs by addressing three aspects that represent sustainability concerns: collections management, participation, education, and mediation. While not exhaustive as far as the place and role of sustainability in museum practice are concerned, these strands identify some of the interfaces between sustainability and museum work. They also underline the diverse and interconnected ways in which sustainability is linked to museum work and the future of museums. Thus, an integrated approach to sustainability may be an effective driver in museum operations and strategies. However, despite acknowledging sustainability concerns, many MPMs have not yet integrated strategies to put sustainability into practice.

Beyond the findings and recommendations of the Future Museums Project Group, further research is needed on how MPMs support environmental sustainability, namely concerning the implementation of sustainable practices in buildings and operations. In that sense, it is important to inquire about the needs in order to support and adapt the infrastructure of national museums and heritage institutions towards more energy-efficient and "greener" buildings.

This study mainly explored a point of view where museums and heritage can contribute and provide multidimensional solutions to achieve a more sustainable future and help address climate change. However, another point needing attention is how climate change (e.g., more frequent extreme climatic events) impacts cultural heritage, increases the degradation and risk factors, and the need to plan and mitigate those threats. A recent report of the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC) group of Member States' experts on "Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change" [63] has stressed that investigation and monitoring is required on such impacts, along with the implementation of proper policies and action plans, which are lacking in the majority of EU member states. Our survey regarding storage in MPMs confirms this evidence to some extent by highlighting a problematic state of the art as to the lack of risk management plans, particularly in national monuments where preventive conservation standards are not in place. In such context, the attention to climate change's adverse impacts on national cultural heritage (outdoor and indoor) requires further research, namely implementing regular monitorisa-

tion of decay factors related to climate change, assessment of such impacts, and follow-up action in MPMS, with risk management assessment, planning, adaptation, and protection. Consequently, such measures will require support from public policies.

Finally, we argue that public policies can offer a relevant contribution by functioning as a framework to drive and establish more sustainable development practices in museums and heritage. Furthermore, within the scope of post-pandemic recovery plans, the climate emergency, and the energy crisis, it is even more pressing that cultural policies provide support for museums and ensure that they have the conditions and resources to move forward in a more integrated manner, thus contributing to a sustainable future and ensuring a positive impact on society and the environment.

Our view is that national cultural policies can and should be articulated with other governmental areas to prepare legislation and reference frameworks, allocate resources, create common strategies, and monitor the application of objectives and quantitative and qualitative indicators in the field of sustainability. One of the main challenges is reconciling a holistic vision that encompasses the aforementioned aspects of sustainability (economic, social, environmental, and cultural) with its practical application, implicating different actors and expertise. Any concerted development of public policies will only be effective if people and communities are aware of, interested in, and involved in these causes that already engage broad sectors of society, which can also be made aware of the importance of contributing to the sustainability of heritage and museums.

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Notes

- ¹ There are four deconcentrated central government bodies—the Regional Directorates for Culture (North, Centre, Alentejo and Algarve), which were entrusted with the responsibility for a number of museums and monuments following an administrative restructuring of the State in 2012. In the context of the reform of Portuguese public administration currently underway, these bodies will be abolished and their competences integrated into the Regional Coordination and Development Commissions by the end of 2023.
- ² Regarding the survey method, one respondent suggested the use of more open-ended questions, or options that allow the answers given in the closed questions to be framed in a more elucidative way [39].
- ³ Under the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Portuguese National Plan for the Arts, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, organized the conference “From Democratization to Cultural Democracy: Rethinking Institutions and Practices” (2021) that took place in Porto Santo Island, Madeira Archipelago, one of the most peripheral regions of the EU. At the end of this event, following a collaborative effort of dozens of European organizations, the Porto Santo Charter was published, in which all EU Member States express the will to prioritize initiatives and measures

that promote and reinforce the importance of Arts & Heritage and Education for the promotion of democracy, diversity, social cohesion and citizenship.

- ⁴ See also a recent report issued by the Swedish Museums Association [56] that demonstrates museums' high public trust, highlighting a significant increase in trust balance (from +59 to +73) in comparison with previous years.

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