

Lithuanian and Latvian museum sector experience during COVID-19 restrictions and museums potential to attract regional audiences

research report by:

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Introduction

The COVID pandemic is an exceptional case in the history of museums around the world. Closing museums for visitors, the disruption of the tourism market, the need to switch to digital activities are just some of the challenges these institutions faced in 2020-2021. The COVID pandemic also impact on the transformation of the tourism sector. In 2020 and 2021, actually all tourism around the world came to a standstill for some time, and the tourism and related industries experienced a severe shock (Yang et al, 2021). The changes in the tourism sector caused by the pandemic are studied in literature in various aspects (Škare et al, 2021), noting that one of the areas of this impact is the change in tourist behaviour (Matiza and Kruger, 2021). The fear of becoming infected with COVID and the restrictions on movement associated with pandemic management have encouraged local tourism within a particular country or region and tourism to neighbouring countries and regions more than it has been observed before COVID (Lebrun et al, 2021). Therefore, it is particularly important to study the museum sector experience during COVID-19 restrictions and draw lessons from this experience in order reveal the potential of museums to attract national, regional and worldwide audiences.

The main goal of this Report is to investigate the Lithuanian and Latvian museum sector experience during COVID-19 restrictions and lessons we can draw from this experience to continue to unlock museums potential to attract regional audiences. The report overview the impact of COVID pandemics on the museum in different countries, the museum's strategies of survival in the time of COVID (lockdown and after lockdown), the lessons of COVID, future strategies for museums after COVID, and the Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border tourism, and the role of museums for this.

These issues prompt the formulation of five research questions:

RQ1 – what is the impact of COVID on museums?

RQ2 – what are the actions and strategies of museums in time of COVID-19?

RQ3 – how museums adapt to changes brought by COVID-19

RQ4 – what skills and competencies the museum professionals lacked during the time of COVID-19?

RQ5 – what are the COVID-19 lessons for museums and their future strategies?

RQ6 – what are the trends in Lithuanian-Latvian cross border tourism before and during the COVID period?

RQ7 – what are the Lithuanian museums potential to attract regional audiences?

The research design was based on three different methodologies: (i) the systematic literature review; (ii) the Google trends analysis; (iii) the analysis of interviews with museum's managers. A detailed description of used methods is presented in the "Methodology" section of this report.

1. Methodology

1.1. Museum Tendencies and Perspectives in the time of COVID: the literature review

1.1.1. Data collection methodology

The methodology for a systematic literature review was prepared using PRISMA-P extension for systematic review protocols (PRISMA, 2015). The books, book chapters, peer reviewed articles, proceedings of conferences and official research reports in English, Russian, Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian selected for this review were published between 2019 and 2021. This research is intended to focus on the broadest possible field of scholarly publication (including all types of publication). The criterion for choosing publications in the English language was the prevalence of

English in the production of global information (Lobachev, 2008). The choice of other languages was based on the project focus on Lithuania and Latvia, including the neighbouring counties. The main criteria for choosing the specific chronological framework were based on chronological framework of COVID-19 pandemics. The information source for the systematic literature review was the academical database *Google Scholar*, one of the largest international and multidisciplinary databases available online without specific accessibility restrictions. The *Publish and Perish* software was also used for the retrieval and analysis of academic citations. The *Zotero* software was used for the management of the bibliographic collection.

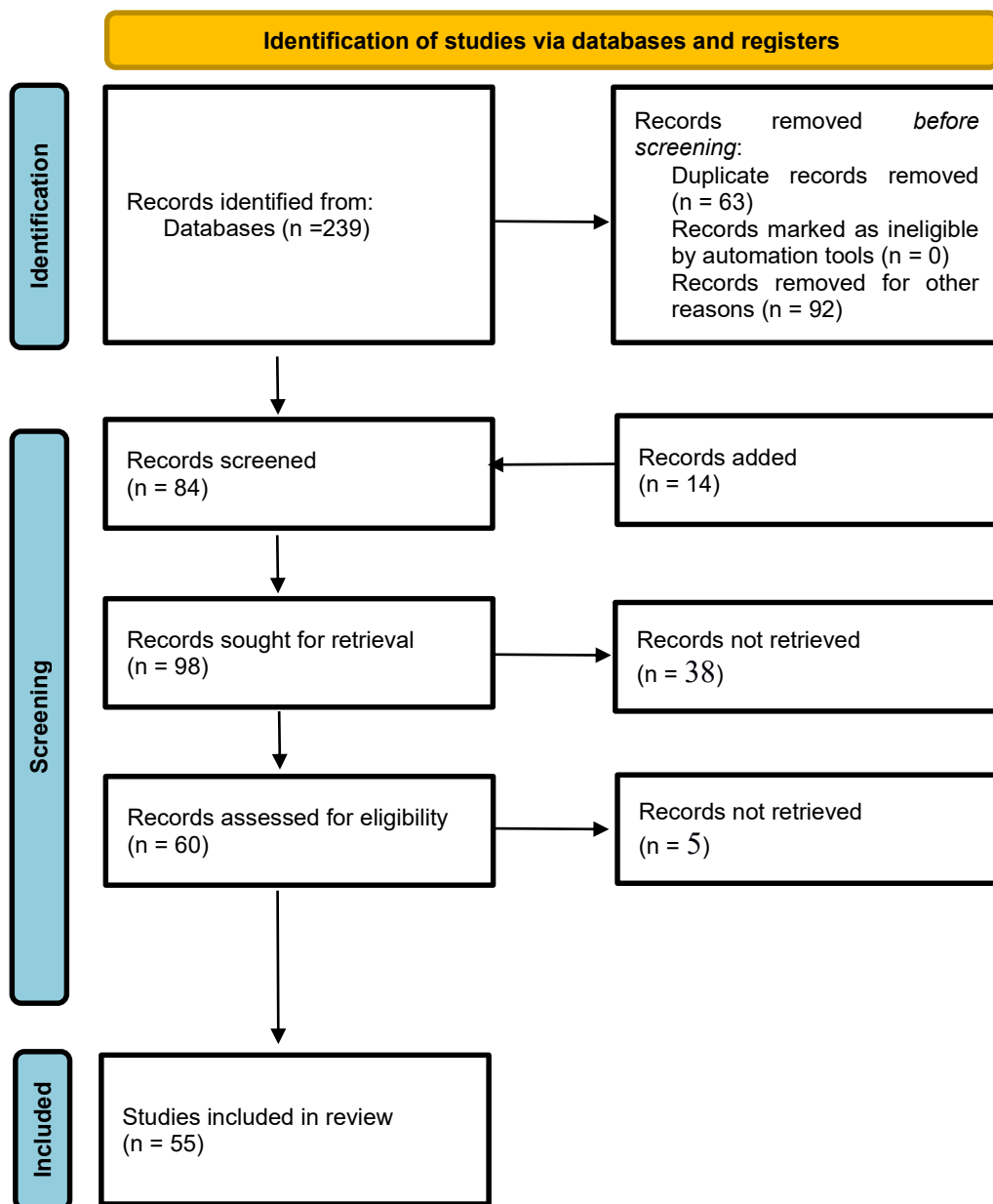


Fig. 1. The flow of information through different phases of a data collection for literature review.

This study research carried out further data collection in the following stages (Fig. 1):

- (1) Extraction of the primary set of literature most likely to be associated with museums and COVID-19 pandemics from the large-scale Google Scholar collection of publications, which include an array of candidate publications commonly associated with the research topic. The

search strategy was based on the Google Scholar search engine and *Publish and Perish* tool using a specific search query: "museum OR museums AND COVID AND strategy*". The specific research query is related to the general project objectives. The research was performed on June 26, 2021. The total number of links to the 239 publications was found. After review of publication titles and descriptions in Google Scholar the set of 84 publications was selected. The metadata of publications and full texts of publications were collected using the *Zotero* software tool.

- (2) The next round of selection was based on the peer-review of the citations of the publications selected in *Google Scholar*. After this the 14 additional publications were selected.
- (3) The first round of screening was based on peer-review of publication abstract. After this the set of 60 publications was formed for the further research.
- (4) The second round of screening was based on peer-review of publication content. After this the final set of 55 publications was formed for the content analysis.

1.1.2. Systematic analysis methodology

Systematic analysis methodology of this study was based on qualitative content analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to answer the research questions. For qualitative data analysis, the included publications were imported into a *Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis* (CAQDAS) packages MaxQDA and QDA Miner for initial transcription or pre-processing of data, and for creation of a specific (predefined and final) coding system, coding and analysis. Coding worked as a systematic classification process that helped to identify themes or patterns, thus forming a basis for the interpretation of the content of the document (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon, 2005). The predefined coding system was created following a deductive approach (according to the project aims and RQ's) that sought to prepare a reliable coding system before beginning the coding (Table 1).

Table 1. Predefined coding schema for qualitative included publications research

Code System
[Authors]
[Author affiliation country]
[Author affiliation]
[Author name and surname]
[Publication]
[Publication year]
[Research & scholarship]
[Discussions]
[Findings and results]
[COVID impact]
[Actions and strategies]
[Adaptation of changes]

[Skills and competencies needed]
[COVID-19 lessons]
[Research methods]
[Empirical material]
[Concepts & theories]
[Research questions, aims, objectives]
[Subject-matter]
[Locations / Countries]
[Institutions / Museums]

The coding system consisted of four broader categories and indicated sub-codes that would go under these categories. It was presumed that new (third level) sub-codes could appear after performing the analysis.

1.2. Cross-border tourism in Lithuania and Latvia according to official statistics and Google Trends

To identify the trends in Lithuanian-Latvian cross border tourism during the COVID period, the data were analysed only in the aspects of tourism between Lithuania and Latvia and Latvia and Lithuania. Two sets of empirical data were selected for the study: Latvian tourist flows in Lithuania, based on official data (Lithuania Statistics; *Travel in Lithuania* and Official Statistics of Latvia) and data from Google trends. According to the official statistics of Lithuania and the Agency ‘Travel in Lithuania’, only those travellers from abroad who used the services of accommodation establishments in Lithuania are recorded. From the point of view of cross-border tourism, this is a major limitation of the study, as a large number of travellers arrive for one day without accommodation when traveling short distances. The classification of a tourist country in the statistics is determined by the citizenship of a person. The same methodology is used in the official Latvian statistics.

If the official statistics show a travelling fact, then, considering the Google Trends data, it is assumed that the data shows the intentions of people in one country to visit another country and the potential geography of those visits (potentially visited objects). Therefore, it was studied what were the search trends in Lithuania for Latvia and in Latvia for Lithuania? How did they change during the COVID period? During the data collection, the same study topic was analysed for each country: the name of the other country in the official language (in Lithuania - “Latvia”, in Latvia - “Lithuania”). Google Trends data were collected on October 30, 2021. For the purposes of the survey, Google Trends data were collected from March 1, 2019 till October 30, 2021. The aim was to assess not only the period of COVID, but also the period of one year before the pandemic reached Lithuania and Latvia and the quarantine was declared. The data were analysed both -for the whole period and breaking into shorter periods – matching quarantine and non-quarantine cycles in Lithuania and Latvia: (i) pre-pandemic period 201-03-03 / 2020-03-10; (ii) the period of the first quarantine 2020-03-11 / 2020-06-15; (iii) the period after the first quarantine (2010-06-16 / 2020-11-10); (iv) the period of the second quarantine (2020-11-11 / 2021-06-10); (v) the period after the second quarantine (2021-06-11 / 2021-10-30). The Google Trends data is collected on a territorial

basis. The main limitation of this method is that Google Trends only collects data from Google searches and searches in other browsers (such as Firefox or Microsoft Edge) are not recorded.

1.3. Interview with the managers of the largest museums and their representatives in order to find out what strategies museums have used to attract tourists from neighbouring countries

For this study was used an interview method and selected several museums, one of which would represent the Lithuanian region and the other would be linked to the border movement route. The other three represented Lithuanian national museums, which can name the general trends observed by Latvian tourists in major cities and the capital. The interview was taken from the Lithuanian Sea Museum in Klaipėda, which is a republican museum, relatively close to the Latvian border, and receives a large number of Latvian tourists a year. The Šiauliai Aušra Museum is also of republican level, located in one of the largest cities in Lithuania, easily accessible to travellers from Latvia via one of the main roads and frequented by them. The Lithuanian National Museum of Art, which connects eleven individual museums, was selected for the study of the wider field of tourism, and most of the data were provided on the basis of the data of the Palanga Amber Museum, a branch of the museum located in the resort town. The museum is also frequented by tourists from Latvia, as it is about 25 km from the border crossing. The National M. K. Čiurlionis Museum has been chosen as one of the largest museums in the region of central Lithuania. Of course, it was necessary to include in the statistic one of the largest museums - the Lithuanian National Museum. The museum is not only composed of many separate museum divisions, but also represents the most frequently visited museums in the Lithuanian capital as Gediminas castle. Representatives of the museums were asked to prepare to answer pre-written questions. The video interview talked about the change in visitors during the pandemic year. We asked to compare visitor composition and the dynamics of foreign visitors. Also, the benefits and necessity of the Baltic bubble in 2021 were asked.

2. Results

2.1. Museum Tendencies and Perspectives in the time of COVID: the literature review

Given the objectives of the project, part of the coding results, including [Research & scholarship] sub-code [Findings and results], III (third level) sub-codes: [COVID impact]; [Actions and strategies]; [Adaptation of changes]; [Skills and competencies needed]; and [COVID-19 lessons] were used.

The scientific articles used in the study include museum research in different countries: Chile, China, Greece, Italy, Indonesia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. The research was carried out in different museums both in terms of the size of the museums and in terms of their significance in the museology of the country and the region, as well as in terms of themes and potential audiences. The main museums mentioned in the study are: Anne Frank House, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Auschwitz Memorial, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, British Museum, CAC Malaga, International Slavery Museum, Louvre Museum, Madrid Costume Museum, Martin Gusinde Anthropological Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Musée d'Orsay, Museum of contemporary art "Garage", Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, National Arts Council and, National Gallery Singapore, National Art Museum of Catalonia, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, National Museums Ensemble from Targoviste, China Science and

Technology Museum, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, New Zealand Art Gallery, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Picasso Museum of Barcelona, Prado National Museum, Reina Sofia Museum, Rijksmuseum, Romanian National Museum of Arts, Singapore Art Museum, State Darwin's Museum, Northern Maritime Museum in Archangelsk, the Suter Art Gallery, Thyssen Bornemisza Museum, US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The main topics of the description of the results are based on the research questions, formulated in the Introduction part of this report.

2.1.1. COVID impact on the museum sector

The majority of studies state a great a COVID impact on the museum sector. It is noted, that one of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic was the complete closure of museums around the world. The temporary closure of a physical museum made it impossible to organize face-to-face activities (Ou, 2020), therefore, the main impact on museums during the pandemic was a decrease in visitor numbers and museum closures, constraints on museum maintenance, and an increase in the museum's digital services (#14). Thus, museums had to adapt to remain significant to their audience and to continue to achieve their missions' (Zbucnea, 2020). In Poland, 75% of the museums were unprepared for this (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021).

The most frequently mentioned problems caused by the COVID and post-COVID situation are: (i) blocking the direct contact between visitors and museum collections and the staff; (ii) the sudden decrease in funding: cutting off the visitor-related revenues (direct impact) and affecting sponsorships and other financing mechanisms (indirect impact); (iii) additional costs have been registered, such as disinfecting protocols or acquisition of digital technology; (iv) ensuring pandemic security requirements in the museum; (v) the need to develop new museum products and services very quickly (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021; Zbucnea, 2020).

However, 'when God closes the door, somewhere he opens a window', and for museums the window is the multiple digital platforms (Ou, 2020).

COVID has pushed museums not only to use digital technologies to develop new digital products and services, but also to 'reinvent the museum again, the COVID paradigm shift has raised questions concerning how these institutions reinvented themselves and modified their communicative strategies to promote heritage through active citizen participation' (Rivero, 2020). The authors note that 'cultural institutions need to re-invent the way they approach both their audience and technology, they need to transform their narratives from object-centric to people-centric, including stories which have always been the most basic method we communicated experiences, oral traditions and knowledge' (Vayanou, 2020); 'the loss of the earned and raised income and how museums were forced to quickly rethink how they serve their communities' (NEMO, 2020), that drive museums to rethink the museum as a community-oriented organization that restores the relationship with audiences by using capabilities and sources to support social, sustainable and inclusive growth of communities' (Zbucnea, 2020). And 'furthermore, the result is considered to be particularly encouraging as the operation of the museums has acquired a new dynamic, a necessary condition in the functioning in the modern world' (Tsichla, 2020). The studies shows that museums reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, developing online and digital sources to adapt and deliver their offers, to have a voice within society; they 'are actively using information technology to learn how to shape the museum as a cultural and technological space that enables audiences and communities to interact and contribute to knowledge about cultural contents and support social values and identities rediscovering an activist role' (Zbucnea, 2020).

In the analysed scientific literature, the impact of COVID on museums is detailed in several aspects, which we will discuss further in this paper.

2.1.1.1. Impact on the staff

The COVID pandemic disrupted the museum's usual algorithms and protocols (Sarkisova, 2020). The majority of the staff was accustomed to constantly working in their physical workplaces in museums. And some activities (storage of collections) were carried out exclusively in the physical spaces of the museum. At the onset of the pandemic in most cases, museum employees worked from home and their activities and responsibilities have changed to better cope with the new context (NEMO, 2020).

Due to the museums financial lost, the employees of the museums have the fear of furlough or layoffs (Antara, 2020). A significant part of museum staff were unsure about the future of their institutions (ArtFund, 2019). This fuelled tension. Part of the museums that did not have stable state funding did not have the capacity to pay legal wages to the employees and part of employees working as temporary employed or as freelancers were either unemployed or furloughed (Antara, 2020; ArtFund, 2019) 'In the US, 23% of the art organizations reduced staff and 24% reduced salaries' (Americans for the Arts, 2020); 'around the world, 30% of the museums intend to downsize, with the highest figures in North America' (ICOM, 2020).

This problem has particularly hard hit the museum staff (guides, educators) working with visitors on temporary contracts (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021). Other museums 'worked very hard to find solutions to keep the staff employed by changing tasks and ensuring their safety by finding ways for them to work from home' (NEMO, 2020).

The situation was somewhat different in state and municipally funded museums, which maintained the existing salaries and the number of jobs during the pandemic. However, the increasing workload and the changed content of the activity required different skills and a larger number of employees.

A significant part of the museum staff due to the changed nature of activities, especially of independent and national museums (in the UK) worry about their roles in the new context (Knott, 2020; ArtFund, 2019). In order to solve the problem of the shortage of staff with limited financial resources, museums in some countries have attracted a large number of external volunteers (NEMO, 2020).

The transition to a remote digital environment required different skills and competencies of museum staff. Many employees needed to achieve higher levels of digital, media and information literacy in a sufficiently short time; as 'there are immediate needs in basic digital skills particularly for developing content and communicating successfully via social media, advanced training and support in areas such as measuring digital engagement and producing digital content (e.g., online exhibitions) would be welcomed' (ArtFund, 2019).

The winners in this situation were those museums that had previously paid sufficient attention to improving the mentioned skills and competencies of the staff. Also the museums with their strong IT professionals and digitization centres where people can train and consult other museum staff remotely, carry out 'free online training (webinars etc.) seen as the most useful area of support' had advantage (ArtFund, 2019)

During the quarantine 'many museum professionals who fall into the category of 'digital immigrants' when assigned social media tasks climbed steep learning curves to execute the tasks of keeping their communities engaged (NEMO, 2020). On the other hand, lockdown was a real opportunity to develop more than just digital training and development for museum staff, as the transition to distance learning has opened up great opportunities, including participation in global seminars in other countries or international organizations and inviting lecturers, who otherwise could not have been invited.

2.1.1.2. Impact on collections

The impact of the COVID pandemic on museum collections and their management is almost the least discussed in the literature. It is discussed in the context of declining museum finances and the

security of collections. When the majority of the employees started to work from home, ‘the security of the museums’ collections is of the top concern’ (Antara, 2020). During the quarantine ‘10% of museums around the world have taken additional security measures to protect their collections (ICOM, 2020; Zbучea, 2020). However, ‘the pandemic has created diverse opportunities for new collecting and research ventures, particularly in the domains of public health, social and environmental impacts, and community resilience (#4).

Yet the pandemic has also led to the use of large amounts of new chemicals for disinfection in museum spaces, therefore, ‘museum professionals, especially conservators, must prepare to experiment with materials and cleaning techniques’ (#8), to determine which ones are best suited for both visitor safety and the security of museum exhibits.

2.1.1.3. Impact on finance, management and marketing

Actually, COVID has had a strong impact on the finances of all museums (as well as other sectors dependent on tourists and visitors) (ICOM, 2020; Kotarba-Morley, 2020; NEMO, 2020). Museums have lost revenue from visitors, renting premises and other similar things. ‘The American Alliance of Museums estimates that museums are losing \$33M a day because of closures in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. New York museums are losing \$3.5M a day. The New York loss is 10% of the total loss of our nation’s museum community’ (NEMO, 2020). In some countries there was ‘a strong feeling that not all museums and galleries can or will survive this’ (ArtFund, 2019).

The impact of COVID on the finances of a particular museum depended on various factors: the dependence of the museum, the funding system of the museum in a particular country, the location of the museum, the museum's previous (pre-COVID) activities, and the museum's accumulated financial reserves. The researchers noted that ‘private museums and those in the capital cities are being the most impacted’ (NEMO, 2020); It’s ‘somewhat paradoxical, that the museums that were the most successful in business operations, therefore, previously more independent from sponsorships and funding schemes, have been the hardest hit’ (Knott, 2020; Stokes, 2020); and ‘museums with larger reserves are currently more protected, but because of this feeling they may lose out on funding to more vulnerable organisations’; and the museums with current large capital projects may be cushioned now but have expect to struggle to meet additional fundraising targets (ArtFund, 2019).

In many countries, both public and private organizations set up a mechanism to help museums, as well as other cultural organizations and artists, to survive the multiple challenges they face due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Carrigan, 2020; de Silva, 2020; Hickley, 2020; McGivern, 2020). Most museums needed support (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021). The actual operation of the aid depends on the funding models of the country's museums (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021). ‘In the US we are heavily dependent on a private funding model, whereas in the European Union, state and federal funding models prevail. The post pandemic rapid recovery of some of the European Union’s largest museums may be largely attributed to their radically different funding structure’ (NEMO, 2020).

On the other hand, the transition of museums to remote work required additional investment in digital technology and marketing. ‘In terms of marketing strategies a study shows that museum marketing managers turned to the Digital format, although the associated costs are increasing.’ (Zbучea, 2020).

‘In terms of the operation of museums under COVID, the winners are those countries that have invested in the field. In April 2020, the Dutch government launched financial stimuli aimed specifically at supporting the cultural sector during the COVID-19 crisis. This set of policies aimed at supporting larger subsidized institutions (e.g. state museums) in dealing with the financial impact of the lockdown, as well as improving their cultural offer for the next cultural season’ (Marques, 2020). In some cases, although the states allocated money, the funding models for the museums were inadequate and prevented those funds from reaching the museums.

‘The federal funds allocated in the CARES Act went to states and museums that never ‘closed.’ To speed the distribution process, the NEA and NYSCA restricted funding to museums which were successful in prior years in obtaining grants. The majority of IMLS funds were immediately set aside for libraries’ (NEMO, 2020).

On the positive side of the financial challenges facing COVID, this has also provided an impetus for museums, as ‘a reactive ‘survival mode is common, but some are taking the opportunity to review their business models and ‘reimagine’ (ArtFund, 2019) and ‘made the digital content a key method of the fundraising. Fifty-five out of sixty-six cultural institutions reported using digital content to increase donations to their organization (Ryder, 2021).

Many museums faced a management challenge with the onset of the COVID epidemic: quickly organize a ‘new’ museum that would operate effectively online during quarantine and ensure the safety of visitors and staff in the museum's operation during non-quarantine periods. The main challenges were in the following areas: a) visitor strategy and management policies, b) spatial configurations and exhibition design and c) movement flow based on social distancing parameters’ (Vayanou, 2020). A focus on transparency was another theme identified in the studies on management of museums in time of COVID (Ryder, 2021). On the other hand, ‘new social distancing rules, one-way navigation systems, and hand sanitising regulations are affecting the embodied practice of visitors inside the museum. These changes potentially pose a threat to the experience of disabled people, in particular blind and partially sighted visitors, as they create new barriers to access the environment and the collection’ (#8), which has also become a challenge for museums.

Significant challenges also arose for the marketing and communication of museums, which also had to become fully digital. Marketing strategies have changed, ‘a new boost was given to e-mail marketing strategies. Another change is targeting more local audiences’ (Zbuckea, 2020).

Communication messages about the museum’s online activities were prepared and sent much more frequently than during carrying out the same activities in physical space. The messages themselves had to be different, tailored entirely to remote audiences (Klusek, 2020). Some museums had nothing to communicate about for some time.

This has particularly affected museums, which have carried out most of their activities in the physical space and have had little experience in developing digital services and products. It has also affected museums, which have seen activities in the digital space only as another way to attract visitors to the physical space.

A study in Spain showed that, ‘the promotional activity of museums during the lockdown has been reduced compared to the stage before the lockdown’ (Mas, 2021). The very nature of the museum's marketing has changed. The promotion of events had to change to the promotion of the content as ‘the impossibility of attending museums in person has led to a change in communication strategy, the most visible effect of reducing publications whose objective is to promote activities and increase publications aimed at disseminating information’ (Mas, 2021); ‘the social media have evolved into tools for spreading knowledge’ (Agostino, 2020).

It is important to note that under the COVID, museums have become much more interested in visitors and audiences in terms of communication compared to the period before the lockdown. This is seen as an important shift from an elitist, autocratic, exhibit-oriented curatorial museum to a democratic, visitor-oriented participatory museum. Due to the close links of the participatory museum (as a phenomenon of reality) with digital technologies, museum turn towards the development of digital technologies, products and services, which are new opportunities for museums. ‘The digital technologies have offered the internet as a simple communication channel. It can provide a framework for significant personal and educational experiences. It allows development of new cultural and educational offers’ (Fedele, 2020). And ‘it has been exploited in various ways by museums around the world in the past few years, but the lock-down associated to the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the strategies forward’ (Zbuckea, 2020).

In Poland, about 75% of museums collect feedback about the moods and expectations of their audiences (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021). Therefore, ‘we can find that visitors who traditionally

belonged to the museum's external stakeholders began to act as internal stakeholders. User participation or involvement in the products of museums and visitors' experiences, replace experts, who previously performed this role, and also engages other users' (#9).

Such changes encouraged many museums to start treating audiences not as 'society in general' or 'non-professional audiences', but to define and classify them according to various criteria, such as: audiences seeking learning support, audiences seeking emotional support and entertainment, stakeholders who wish to keep involved (Samaroudi, 2020).

Cognition of audiences meant that 'the growing opinions of users provide a variety of usefulness for museum's contents to other users. More diversified opinions make it easy for users to offer their own views' (#9). On the other hand, under COVID conditions 'the social media allowed institutions not only to communicate their digital content to a wider audience but also receive measurable and significant feedback from it' (Ryder, 2021). And this turn of museums to the audiences was a success', as 'understanding the public image of museums helps museums redesign their organisation and stimulated to meet the expectations of contemporary audiences coherently, given the recent societal developments' (Zbucka, 2021).

2.1.1.4. Impact on communication activities

The greatest impact of the COVID epidemic was and continues to be on museum communication activities. The pandemic has dictated and dictates completely new, unusual conditions for museum activities. 'During the lockdown, remote, digital products and services offered in the digital space became the only possible means of interaction with visitors (and - to a large extent - the implementation of museum functions in general)' (Vybornova, 2020).

Lockdown transformed digital content into museums central message and social media into their primary communication medium (Ryder, 2021). For instance, some museums are now using Facebook to share information about an art piece and reveal some or other unknown aspects about it. Other museums have arranged interviews with experts or guided tours in the company of the museum's director. Still others have chosen a more 'playful' approach, running virtual treasure hunts among the museum's collections or organising quiz events (Agostino, 2020).

Even after the end of the first quarantine in the spring of 2020, the number of visitors to the physical spaces of the museums decreased significantly (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021). Most of the museums have migrated to social networks in comparison to other virtual program offerings (Nemo, 2020). Social media platforms, especially Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, become the museums' preferred means to spread culture during the COVID-19 lockdown (Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021; Agostino, 2020; Ryder, 2021). In Italy museums 'saw a significant rise in their online activity which doubled on all social media platforms as from March 2020 when Italy went into lockdown and every museum in the country was forced to shut down (on the 8th of March). On average, museums would publish 25 posts a month on Facebook before, but they rose to 40 in March. On Twitter, the previous 32 posts a month went up to 60 and, on Instagram, they more than doubled, rising from 15 to 33 posts a month per museum' (Agostino, 2020).

Museums that had created digital content in the past performed better because it was when the lockdown struck unexpectedly, they could 'further promote the pre-existing digital content to connect with audiences', then turn to introducing a totally new digital content (Ryder, 2021).

Research on museum performance during COVID focuses on the following key themes for museum performance in the digital space and the presentation of digital content: (i) live digital content; (ii) serialized digital content; (iii) increased accessibility; (iv) social media engagement (Ryder, 2021). 'A range of approaches for connecting with the public was: (i) an educational approach, where material is passed by the museum to the user. This is a one-way relationship, proceeding from the museum, and involves things like the storyline for a work of art, an interview with an expert or a tour with a guide. (ii) asynchronous interaction, when the user is handed information or material, but is not required to join in or reply on social media. Treasure hunts and *ArtYouReady flashmobs*

fall into this group. In this case, the relationship flows two ways between museum and visitor, and although instigated by the museum, it requires a (asynchronous) response from the user. (iii) consists of synchronous interaction, where the museum and a visitor interact in real time. Here the relationship is two-way but, differently from the previous case, it is simultaneous. This group includes educational initiatives with real-time interaction between museum and students/children and meetings with Museum Friends' (Agostino, 2020).

Another important aspect of communication was learning how to use a variety of digital tools in museum activities. A major challenge for museums was the use of social networks for communication. Museologists chose the networks they already knew from before. 'Connections with audiences went from physical to virtual; the vast majority of museum staff took advantage of the platform with which they were most familiar. In the 2019 State of NY State Museums survey, 37% of respondents reported using Facebook and 22% - Instagram' (NEMO, 2020).

However, most museums were accustomed to using social networks in ways acceptable to industrial society as an additional means of disseminating information. What is fundamentally at odds with the principle of social networking, which is networking and community mobilization.

As a result, some museums (those that followed the understanding of an industrial society) used social networks less effectively than other museums, which before the pandemic understood the purpose of social networks and how they operate in the Network society.

The museums that understand how social networks work in the Network society have generally treated them as an independent medium with its own advantages (which can be exploited) and disadvantages (which need to be eliminated). Such a situation was recorded in Poland (Klusek, 2020) and Spain (Mas, 2021). In general, 'the promotional activity of museums in Spain during the lockdown was reduced, and increased in the post lockdown stage compared to the lockdown stage' (Mas, 2021).

However, a deeper analysis shows that this process affected different museums differently. If, for example Picasso Museum's of Barcelona relative weight of the promotional publications of the Museums in the pre and post lockdown periods was 91,9% to 33,3% to 64,0%; then of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona - 88,3% to 82,9% to 83,9% (Mas, 2021).

These figures show that the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona used social networks in a way that was typical of the network society before the pandemic, much more than the Picasso Museum of Barcelona did. And here museums like the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona won in their adaptation to changing communication conditions.

In this way, those museums, which understood the work of social networks have ways to communicate their collections in response to the information behaviours typical to social network users, won. For example, users of the Darwin Museum Facebook page could use ritual masks from the museum's collections to make selfies (Kubasova, 2020). On the other hand, the question of the limits of ethics in adapting museum exhibits to the creation of one or another effect specific to social networks remains open. However, in the longer term, it is important that 'museums not only increased their online activity, they have also changed what they are sending over these channels' (Agostino, 2020).

Besides, during the quarantine period, museums also had to adopt other, lesser-known digital environments, platforms for distance learning and conferencing, such as Zoom (Klusek, 2020). The main difficulties identified in the transition to a different kind of communication were: (i) a lack of time (Ryder, 2021); (ii) public readiness to accept museums as digital institutions, including museum-independent digital inclusion and digital divide (Zollinger, 2021, # 16); (iii) ability to apply and combine synchronous and asynchronous methods in museum activities (Vayanou, 2020); (iv) development of popular, attractive content tailored to non-professional audiences (Sarkisova, 2020); (v) the lack of specialized staff to create digital content at the same capacity once temporary closures ended (Ryder, 2021).

The use of digital technologies made it much more difficult to assess the performance of museums and their impact on the society, as previous methodologies for the non-digital environment (such as calculating visitor flows) have ceased to exist and new methodologies have not been developed.

Still, 'using primarily Instagram and Facebook with their digital content, cultural institutions increased social media engagement during this time. Although there was no consensus on best practices in measuring social media engagement, many institutions highlighted tracking active engagement such as comments, and sharing.' (Ryder, 2021). 'There was no consensus among participants about the best way to measure social media engagement; therefore, some common themes did emerge. Although thirteen participants used the term engagement to define how they measured engagement, several participants specified the metrics they tracked' (Ryder, 2021).

The importance of the museum's links with specific thematic or geographical communities also became very important during the COVID period. Museums with strong community ties could more easily offer community services, thus not only expanding their range of services but also creating greater value for specific communities and the society in general (Ryder, 2021).

This could be family and home learning, working with classroom teachers and schools or collection and touring exhibitions. Museums in New Zealand 'developed and shared educational resources, but perhaps more importantly they provided emotional support and connection through art in this unprecedented time of physical separation. Collectively, these notes from the field demonstrate how students, families, teachers, and art gallery educators were able to benefit from the ability of art to facilitate well-being in uncertain times' (McNaughton, 2020). In this way, 'being considered as an educational medium, the museum can now focus on educational purposes. The museums can develop a different genre of educational content which is suitable for children, and can contribute to social responsibilities as well as earn money from online platforms' (Antara, 2020). Moreover, that 'one of the most important points regarding new media for museums is whether it is possible to create a 'constructivist museum' of local communities through user-centered customization and user participation'. (#9).

Meanwhile, remote communication by digital means has made it possible to involve new, atypical audiences (#27). The digitization of collections sometimes plays an evident role in types of offerings targeting such groups, while other times it is more subtle (Samaroudi, 2020). The 'museums' effort to adapt to online audiences has considerably increased especially in countries where previous online activities were scarce' (Zbucha, 2020), including the ones whose 'needs are closely linked to the societal developments during the pandemic (people isolating, people with dementia, anti-racism activists and more). The 'museum's change creates a different bond with young people, and digitization also brings young people closer to museums through the online shop, a tool particularly used by young people' (#10). At the same time, 'museums, and health organizations, recognize the role of arts, culture and cultural heritage for older adults' well-being, especially in times of social distance and isolation' (#16).

Increased remote activities and the adaptation of museum expositions to new security conditions after quarantine have made museums much more accessible to people with disabilities as 'many of the solutions that have been employed to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic, are the very same solutions that disabled people have advocated for years'(#8). However, the transition to remote operation in the digital space, the opportunity to discover new audiences, has meant the museum's performance in the global marketplace and the challenges associated with it. Thus, those museums that had more material adapted to a more global audience before the COVID pandemic, including the translation of content into popular, global languages, won' (Nastase, 2020). Another important change brought about by the digital communication space was the possibility for museums to offer different, new services, such as: 'many of the communication offerings have used collections as prompt for events, activities, discussions and more. However, there is great potential in trying to explore better ways to link communication offerings and digitised collections not only to enhance interest for the collections themselves but also make them more relevant to the society' (Samaroudi, 2020).

Understanding the value of co-creation, 'museums have recently been transformed into user-centred institutions. Based on the ubiquitous environment, the number of users who can easily access museums with a smartphone or digital device is increasing, making it easy to access museum content. In this way, museums have begun to provide content that users can choose for themselves,

which means that museums offer users partly shared responsibilities and interchangeable roles. Furthermore, users start to create value jointly' (#9).

Museum communication on social networks has sparked a debate about the ethical principles of such communication. On the one hand, in the context of such a negative COVID pandemic mood, it is very important to choose the content to be communicated and the messages to be constructed, 'staff must be 'more sensitive than usual' and as a result, 'sometimes silence is better' and 'institutions are currently catering to the emotional needs of audiences by creating positive distractions from the pandemic' (Kist, 2020). Museums have to be 'reflecting on past and present social responsibility' and 'framing contemporary experiences of isolation' (Kist, 2020). But on the other hand 'avoiding social media or focusing on positive content only may eclipse opportunities to support critical thinking in relation to responsibility and empathy' (Kist, 2020). In fact, many institutions are currently catering to the emotional needs of audiences by creating positive distractions from the pandemic. 'These are complemented by humorous projects such as the Twitter take-over by Tim, the security guard at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum (Oklahoma); Sue, the T-rex dancing on our Instagram feeds at the Field Museum (Illinois); and adorable penguins inside the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Missouri). These examples are evidence of museums creating entry points for engagement and innovative connections' (Kist, 2020).

Another topic related to museum communication in the context of a pandemic is reopening museums for visits after the quarantine, when 'the first concern is related to the safety both of visitors and museum staff' (Zbucnea, 2020). Reopening was started (after both quarantines) from outdoor spaces that were not only safer, but also more willingly chosen by visitors who feared being infected with COVID. Thus, during the reopening process, museums with large outdoor exhibition spaces or located in a natural environment suitable for walks and being in the fresh air, won. 'One important effect at the spatial level is the increasing importance of open public spaces or open air activities, where it is easier to develop strategies to assure fruition in safer conditions' (#7). In such museums, especially after the first spring quarantine in 2020, 'a strong recovery in the last two months considered, July and August' (Nastase, 2020). Of course, despite the end of the quarantine, the number of visitors to most of the museum's physical spaces has been declining, 'public access dropped by 1/3 compared to the general number of visitors' (Nastase, 2020). And this was especially true for the period after the first quarantine. And museums had to give up some activities in the exhibitions in the physical space', 'most museums have paused all hands-on activities and tactile exhibits in response to the pandemic' (# 8).

2.1.2. Actions and strategies of museums in time of COVID and how museums adapt to changes brought by COVID

The most important change in museums during the COVID period and the most important adaptation strategy for museums was the real museums digital turn. 'It is possible that the lockdown has accelerated a process already begun by museums as 2.0' (Rivero, 2020).

The use of digital technology in museums started before COVID. However, due to institutional conservatism, digital technologies were used in museums in conservative, more end-of-twentieth-century methods, such as the development of a collection information system, by its informational behaviour closer to data information system than to a tool for communication for general public. The use of digital IT is a challenge for museums. And in the face of this challenge, quite a big part of the professional community (not only in the academic community, but also among heritage professionals, politicians, businessmen and others engaged with culture) before the COVID was lost. 'The growth of museums was relatively slow. However, there has been a growing movement in recent years based on the belief that museums will not be competitive without communication and engagement with users' (#9). Many of the theorists dealing with the application of digital technology in heritage practices and knowledge still think in the way people thought in industrial

society. For them the computer is not a reality-changing instrument, but rather only one more “new machine” that considerably increases productivity. The applied models, methods, habits, concepts, and characteristics of the industrial society that were active and helped several decades ago stopped working or do not work like they used to. Digital technologies are often accused “per se” of preventing them from working and ‘active resistance’ actions are taken. However, when ‘fighting’ for or against technologies, we often do not notice what is going on ‘beyond the technologies’. However, having to be resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic, the museums have shifted to online museums and the vast majority of organizations have increased their online presence (ArtFund, 2019; Antara, 2020; Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021; #10; #12; #14; #15; #20; #24; #25; #27). The pandemic challenges us as individuals, as collectives and as cultural institutions to provoke change, specifically at a time when people are isolated physically but increasingly connected through social and digital media (Kist, 2020). And in this situation, those museums that had more advanced digitization activities before the COVID pandemic, such as creating 3D content, virtual reality products, or Google Arts content (Kubasova, 2020; # 30), have won.

Another important element of the museum's strategic operation under COVID conditions was the increased social responsibility of the museum. This was manifested in activities of public importance that were not very typical of museums before the pandemic. These include not only specialized exhibitions on virology or the history of pandemics (Klusek, 2020), but also community-based educational activities on pandemic vaccination safety, the sharing of masks and personal protective equipment. For example: ‘China Science and Technology Museum has also offered ‘ammunition’ to the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic by coordinating donation of much-needed face masks, gloves, sanitizers and other medical supplies to the worst-hit Hubei province’ (Ou, 2020). Another group of socially responsible activities was services for lonely and excluded members of society and ‘these digital initiatives also helped mitigate the negative health impact of COVID-19 on people (such as isolation and distress) by fostering spaces that support social interaction, engagement, stimulation as well as respite care’ (Tan, 2020). It was understood during the pandemic that ‘concerted strategy among three sectors – cultural heritage, social care and the health care – and the leveraging of museums’ online activities could contribute to making well-being and social inclusion a reality for older people’ (#16). Museums with financial resources were ‘supporting artists <...> very rarely the Romanian museums develop their collections through acquisitions’ (Zbucea, 2020).

2.1.3. Skills and competencies were missing by the museum professionals at the time of COVID

The COVID pandemic created a situation for the need for skills and competencies that were not necessary for people working in museums in the pre-pandemic period. These include: (i) skills in managing personal time, planning work and leisure time, reconciling work and family activities when working remotely from home; (ii) skills to work in isolation without contact with colleagues or contacting colleagues online (Marques, 2020); (iii) creativity skills and competencies (Antara, 2020); (iv) digital skills and competencies, not only in communicating museum content in the digital space, but also in managerial, document management, such as creating and using your e-signature, preparing documents in a virtual environment, performing your work remotely.

The COVID situation (working both remotely and in a physical space) required greater empathy and patience from museum professionals working with visitors; ‘due to the pandemic, staff must be ‘more sensitive than usual’ and as a result, ‘sometimes silence is better’, ‘reflecting on past and present social responsibility’ and ‘framing contemporary experiences of isolation’ (Kist, 2020).

2.1.4. COVID lessons for museums and future strategies

Many authors, in examining COVID lessons, see the pandemic as a positive impetus for the museum sector when ‘the COVID-19 has been in some instances a sort of catalyst for the action as <...> institutions not only have increased their activity but have also published content with greater educational value’ (Rivero, 2020). Moreover, the accelerated move to online consumption increased the urgency for memory institutions such as museums to introduce new ways to digitally experience cultural collections (Samaroudi, 2020; Sarkisova, 2020, Anesa, 2020). ‘Sustainable, socially conscious, diverse and inclusive, empathetic and co-produced, combining tangible and intangible heritage, art and science within technologically and data driven networks and financially sound business models, the work captured the best of future strategies for museum practice both from before and during the Covid-19 crisis. For me, it is this response to museums that we should look to as a model that uses all available tools to create a unique and essential role for museums in post-Covid-19 society’ (Tully, 2020).

The institutional leadership of museum organizations also emerged during the COVID period. ‘The museum authorities like UNESCO, ICOM, are the ultimate decision-makers. Their prompt decision can support a museum to survive during the COVID-19 crisis’ (Antara, 2020).

At the same time, the crisis has highlighted the importance of government and municipal support for the functioning of the museum system. Museums that received such support were not only more resilient, but ‘the museums could ensure the employees’ wages at least. The bank and other financial institutions can promote loans for the museums as well as the elite people of the society along with the local people can donate money to the museums. Sometimes, the employees need to work in a critical situation with a reduced amount of salary’ (Antara, 2020).

During the pandemic, museums gained a lot of experience in using digital technology. The pandemic has shown that museums that use digital technology more intensively have an advantage over those that use it more conservatively. On the other hand, the digital experience, remote and blended services and the products developed must continue to be supported and used even after the epidemic subsides.

‘With a view to be resilient, the museums may need to focus on the digital museum. The digital platforms can be an alternative source of income’ (Antara, 2020). The digital switchover has affected not only services and products, but also deeper levels, the absence of which was one of the barriers to the wider use of digital technology in museums in the period before COVID. ‘Virtual experiences can enable us to immerse ourselves in a different time frame, just as publications and studies can contribute to knowledge and learning. In circumstances like these, can a mountain museum find itself and its *raison d’être* rather in an alpine scenario than within the four walls of its building with few visitors’ self-distancing? An object can perform its function better if kept in a safe place and maybe duplicated with a 3D printer to circulate from house to house among the students. Or even a visit can be booked, allowing for a different relationship with the object, in an empty room, on your own for a few intense minutes’ (Anesa, 2020). ‘It has been observed that museums use a wide range of communication channels, more than they did in the past, and beyond the limits of face-to-face communication at physical spaces, such as exhibitions’ (#9).

During the COVID period, a strong digital, telecommuting infrastructure was developed in most institutions, the existence of which (along with the experience of telework during the quarantine period) calls into question the need for a museum worker to work normally in a physical workplace. In the post-COVID period, the real nature of teleworking (not all) of the museum staff (working remotely a few days a week and working a few days at their physical workplace in a museum) should be seriously considered. The authorities can promote flexible working hours and responsibilities to the employees. In this way, the employees can become more creative rather than now which can lead to the way of further development. As it has been reported that employees feel abandoned by the museum's higher authority like management and trustee (Hadley, 2020).

Another lesson of COVID is the museum's relationship with communities; 'COVID-19 has amplified the social function of museums and reframed what safeguarding heritage and reaching out to communities actually means during a time of extreme duress, and it is not over yet' (#4).

Pandemic experience has shown that it is important for museums to bring together communities of people who are regular visitors and friends to the museum. The orientation towards large numbers of "one-off" visitors (mostly arriving tourists) in the context of the crisis has revealed something completely unsustainable. These are the visitors that museums have lost due to the pandemic of tourism disruption. However, the thematic or geographical communities associated with the museum were and remain the people who ensured the museum's resilience and surviving in times of crisis.

In the context of the pandemic, attention was also drawn to the greater contribution of the museum to the strengthening of the society science literacy, 'to consider the promotion of the public's scientific literacy as a dynamic process instead of a one-off project, and a matter of broad systems engineering rather than just increasing the percentage of scientifically-literate people' (Ou, 2020). Along with COVID, many museums have realized that there is no longer a society as a unified audience in terms of communication. Indeed, there are many different audiences that have different needs, goals, and expectations for museums. And the museum must not only focus its communication on the specifics of these specific target audiences, but also use the knowledge of the target audiences to solve the problems facing the society, 'to implement differentiated strategies for different groups of society in carrying out science popularization work in order to make our service more precise and targeted (using the 'drip irrigation' method rather than the 'flood irrigation' method in science communication)' (Ou, 2020). Cultural institutions have the ability to "make space": creating it, inventing it, transforming it, proposing alternatives to other places, conserving and giving access to extraordinary and unpredictable sites (Pensa, 2020). In order to increase their impact on society, institutions need to apply the principles of open access and 'cultural institutions can redefine their space also through open licenses. A simple way to understand how licences work is to think of the contents of cultural institutions as something unmovable, which licences help to turn into something that can move from one place to another. Thanks to open licenses, the material of cultural institutions can be copied, used, distributed, combined and modified (which is what open licences authorise), with a determinant impact on the very idea of "public". The public needs to be re- thought of, not only as visitors to an exhibition or a website, but also as those who safeguard and enhance the value of their heritage and benefit from it, use it, transform it, re-elaborate it to create social and economic innovation' (Pensa, 2020).

And finally, during the pandemic 'museums strive to understand complex issues, scan the horizon to avoid being swept away by transient issues, and craft thoughtful, creative and trans -formative experiences. This is where the skill of museum professionals and the strength of governance of institutions and the sector will come to the fore. Developing both the skills and the conviction that museums are there proactively to support society is what is needed' (#6). And 'museums are now expanding their role from suppliers to social relationships platforms, using digital technologies and opening their positions to the public. In response, after COVID-19, museums should focus on managing the co-creation of value in the first place, because it is one of the most effective solutions for their sustainable development amidst the challenges in the COVID19 epoch and thereafter' (#9).

2.2. Cross-border tourism in Lithuania and Latvia according to official statistics and Google Trends

2.2.1. General tourism statistics

The agency '*Travel in Lithuania*' provides statistics on tourist flows in Lithuania from different countries. In 2018 and 2019, tourists from Latvia made the fifth largest group of tourists in

Lithuania, after Germany, Poland, Russia and Belarus. 161-169 thousand travellers from Latvia arrived during the year and there was recorded 4.5 percent growth per year. In 2019, Latvian citizens accounted for 4.18 percent of the total tourist flow and 8.7 percent of the flow of foreign tourists in Lithuania. In 2018-2019, Latvian tourists spent on average 1.6-1.7 nights in Lithuania. In 2020, the number of Latvian tourists in Lithuania decreased by 58.7%, but they (69,809 people) made the largest group of foreign tourists. This accounted for 3.2 percent of the total tourist flow and 13.4 percent the flow of foreign tourists in Lithuania.

In 2020, Latvian tourists on average spent 1.8 nights in Lithuania. The year 2021 is not over yet, but we can appeal to the statistics for January-August 2021. According to it, the number of tourists from Latvia has significantly decreased compared to 2020. During the first eight months of 2020, 61,573 tourists from Latvia visited Lithuania (88.2% of the total number of Latvian tourists in 2020). Meanwhile, during the first eight months of 2021, only 25,948 tourists from Latvia visited Lithuania. This is the third largest group of tourists in Lithuania in 2021 (after Germany and Poland). In 2021, although there were not many tourists from Latvia, in eight months Latvian citizens accounted for 17.93 percent of the total tourist flow and 23.4 percent the flow of foreign tourists in Lithuania. In 2021, Latvian tourists spent on average 1.9 nights in Lithuania. Data on Latvian tourist flows in Lithuania is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Latvian tourists in Lithuania in 2018-2021 (according to the agency "Travel in Lithuania").¹

	2018	2019	2020	2021 (1-8)
Total number of tourists	3620390	4037749	2180912	1448691
Total number of foreign tourists	1744733	1937972	521271	262684
Number of tourists from Latvia	161660	168925	69809	25948

The Department of Statistics also counts incoming one-day tourists. In 2018-2020, there were 971,000, 954700 and 528200 of such tourists in Lithuania respectively. However, the number of such tourists is not broken down by countries.

The Official Statistics Portal of Latvia provides statistics on tourist flows from different countries in Latvia. In 2018 and 2019, tourists from Lithuania formed the third largest group of tourists after Russia and Germany. 191-210 thousand travellers from Lithuania arrived during the year and 9.7 percent growth per year was recorded. In 2019, Lithuanian citizens accounted for 7.34 percent of the total tourist flow and 10.76 percent of the flow of foreign tourists in Latvia. In 2018-2019, Lithuanian tourists spent on average 1.7 nights in Latvia. In 2020, the number of Lithuanian tourists in Latvia decreased only by 14.85 percent and they (178425 people) made the largest group of foreign tourists. This accounted for 12.19 percent of the total tourist flow and 24.95 percent of the flow of foreign tourists in Latvia.

In 2018-2019, Lithuanian tourists spent 1.7 nights in Latvia on average. In 2020, the number of Lithuanian tourists in Latvia decreased by only 14.85 percent and they (178425 people) formed the largest group of foreign tourists. This accounted for 12.19 percent of the total tourist flow and 24.95 percent of the flow of foreign tourists in Latvia. In 2020, Lithuanian tourists spent of 1.8 nights in Latvia on average. The year (2021) is not over yet, but we can rely on the statistics for January-

¹ It should be noted that the data of the agency "Travel in Lithuania" differ slightly from the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics. For example, according to the Department, 1738,100 and 527,000 foreign tourists who visited Lithuania in 2019 and 2020, respectively, are treated as tourists if they 'stay at least for one night' and visitors, who travel 'from one place to another outside his or her usual environment' for a period no more than 12 months, and whose main purpose of the journey is not to get employed in the visited country".

August 2021. According to it, the number of tourists from Lithuania has significantly decreased compared to 2020. During the first eight months of 2020, 165,969 tourists from Lithuania visited Latvia (93.01% of the total number of Lithuanian tourists in 2020). Meanwhile, during the first eight months of 2021, only 58,669 tourists from Lithuania visited Latvia. However, it is still the largest group of foreign tourists in Latvia in 2021. In 2021, although there were fewer tourists from Lithuania, in eight months Lithuanian citizens accounted for 6.5 percent of the total tourist flow and 22.86 percent of the flow of foreign tourists in Latvia. In 2021, Lithuanian tourists on average spent 1.9 nights in Latvia. Data on Lithuanian tourist flows in Latvia is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of Lithuanian tourists in Latvia in 2018-2021.

	2018	2019	2020	2021 (1-8)
Total number of tourists	2808808	2853333	1462965	890428
Total number of foreign tourists	1925397	1945919	714975	256592
Number of tourists from Lithuania	190931	209536	178425	58669

Summarizing the data on Lithuanian and Latvian tourist flows in another country, it is necessary to notice a significant flow disproportion. Although the population of Latvia and Lithuania differs approximately 1.47 times, the number of Lithuanian tourists in Latvia compared to the number of Latvian tourists in Lithuania before COVID was 1.18-1.24. However, after COVID it turned into a ratio of 2.26-2.55. Thus, before the pandemic, Lithuanian citizens visited Latvia relatively less than Latvian citizens visited Lithuania. The situation changed greatly during the pandemic. One of the effects of the pandemic on Lithuanian and Latvian tourism is really the huge relative growth of Lithuanian tourist trips to Latvia.

Another statistically significant index² is the decline in the number of tourists in the neighbouring country in 2021 in both countries. It mainly correlates with the overall decrease in the flow of tourists and foreign tourists in Lithuania and Latvia. This can be attributed to greater tourism opportunities to more distant countries in 2021 than in 2020; lower fears of tourists over COVID (vaccines were developed in 2021) and a kind of "tourism shortage fatigue" encouraged more travel. On the other hand, in 2020, local tourism in the Baltic region was promoted by the so-called "Baltic Travel Bubble", which facilitated movement between the three countries.

2.2.2. Google Trend Data

2.2.2.1. Lithuanian's interest in Latvia

During the COVID pandemics, in Lithuania there was a great interest in Latvia. During the entire period of operation of Google Trends (since 2004), the highest fixed interest in Latvia was in July 2020, when this index reached 100. The top three peaks of interest periods during the whole pandemics include July of 2021, when the interest rate reached 90. It can be observed that in the study period (March 2019 - October 2021) the growth of interest is always observed during summer, but in 2020 and 2021 it was much higher than in 2019 (Fig.2). In 2020, the interest growth

² The figures for the interest rate over time refer to the search by interest compared to the highest point on the chart in a given region and over a given time period. 100 is the most popular term, 50 is half the most popular term, and 0 means there was not enough data for the term.

began around May 17-23, peaking on June 28th. - 22 August and then it started declining. In 2021, these periods were May 2-8 and June 13 - August 7 respectively. Thus, in 2021, the period of interest was shorter than in 2020. Shorter and lower interest in Latvia in 2021 compared to 2020 correlates with the total quantitative flows of tourists, which (as well as the reasons for their change) are discussed in the section 'General Tourism Statistics'.

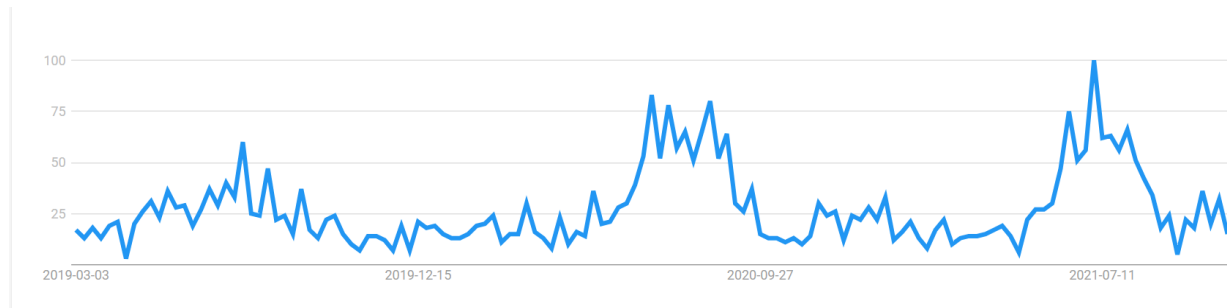


Fig. 2. Interest in Latvia (search term "Latvia") according to Google Trends data (March 2019 - October 2021).

The interest in Latvia in Lithuania during the whole period under study is higher than the interest in another neighbouring country - Poland (Fig. 3). The average interest in Latvia (average - 23) is slightly higher than in Poland (average - 18). Leap of searches for Poland in 2021 at the beginning of July 2021, was conditioned by the Olympic qualifiers with the Polish national team, which was important for the Lithuanian basketball team, and took place on July 3, 2021.

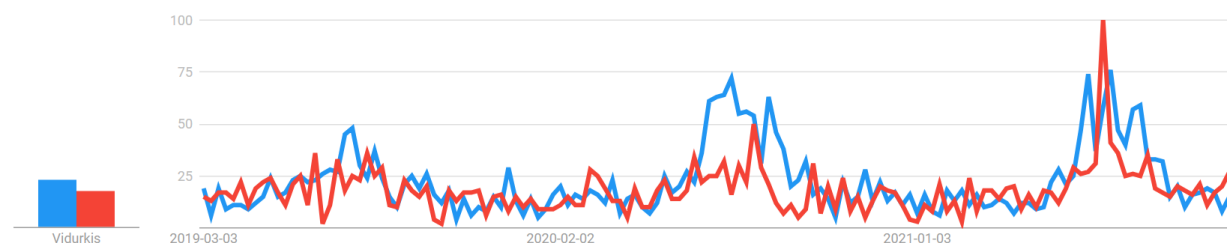


Fig. 3. Interest in Latvia and Poland (search term "Latvia" in blue and "Poland" in red) according to Google Trends (March 2019 - October 2021).

Both during the whole period from 2004 and during the research period, the interest in Latvia (search term 'Latvia') was the highest in the Lithuanian border counties. During the study period the interest distributed in the following way: Panevėžys (indicator – 100³), Šiauliai (91), Telšiai (84), Klaipėda (64), Utena (53). The distribution of the regions changed at different stages of the study period. During the pre-pandemic period (2019-03-01 / 2020-03-10) Tauragė county was the leading county among the top five; during the first quarantine period (2020-03-11 / 2020-06-15)

³ The indicator shows in which locations the search term was the most popular during the specified time period. Values are calculated on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being the most popular location of all searches for that location, 50 being half of the most popular location, and a value of 0 indicating a location with insufficient data for that term. A higher indicator value means a higher proportion of all inquiries, but not their absolute number.

there was a significant increase in searches from Vilnius; when the opportunity to travel reappears (2010-06-16 / 2020-11-10) the border counties start dominating again. This could indicate a correlation between the possibility to travel and the interest in Latvia in the border regions: as the possibility to travel decreases, the relative interest in the neighbouring country in these regions decreases. This is confirmed by the second quarantine (2020-11-11 / 2021-06-10) and the opening of the travel space after it (2021-06-11 / 2021-10-30). During the quarantine period, searches from Vilnius county relatively increased again, and at the end of the quarantine, border counties again dominate. The study compared the main topics and inquiries related to the search topic "Latvia". Related topics show that Internet users searching for the term in question also searched for those topics. Related topics are divided into the most popular (most searched) and growing most popular (topics with the highest search volume increase since the last time period) based on metric values. The popularity index is measured on a relative scale, with 100 being the most searched topic, 50 being the topic with half the number of search inquiries compared to the most popular topic, etc. The popularity rate is expressed in percent as compared with the previous time period. In some cases, a 'breakthrough' in related topics is recorded, which means that the search term has become more popular by more than 5,000 percent. Related inquiries indicate what else users who searched for "Latvia" were searching for. They are also divided into the most popular (most popular search inquiries) and the growing most popular (inquiries with the highest increase in search frequency since the last period) and are also measured on a relative 100-point scale and on a percentage scale termed as 'breakthroughs'.

During the whole study period (March 2019 - October 2021), the most popular topics related to Latvia in Lithuania were focused on searching for information about Latvians, the Latvian language, population, country in general and COVID and quarantine requirements in Latvia. However, there is a clear trend showing the desire of Lithuanians to travel (the topic "travel" is the fifth most popular topic). The interest in traveling in Latvia is partly due to the interest in COVID restrictions and the requirement for needed documents in Latvia. Potential Lithuanian travel destinations in Latvia are indicated by the related popular search topics: 'Sea', 'Riga', 'Pape', 'Nida', 'Ventspils', 'Liepaja'.

Also, in addition to Latvia, there is a potential interest in travel to other countries; the neighbouring countries (Estonia, Poland) are mentioned among the popular search topics. Among the growing popular topics, a breakthrough related to the pandemic ("quarantine", "isolation", "COVID-19 pandemic") is a natural breakthrough. However, tourism-related 'Nida - a village in Latvia' and 'Livu aquapark' are also among the topics of the breakthrough. There is also a breakthrough in the search for Riga Airport, which shows that the perception of Latvia as a transit country has significantly increased in Lithuania during the study period. This is confirmed by a survey of the most popular related requests. These are dominated by travel-related inquiries: 'travel to Latvia', 'traveling to Latvia', 'going to Latvia', 'can I travel to Latvia', 'for those who are going to Latvia', 'QR code in Latvia'. Among the mentioned potential tourist attractions in Latvia are Nyca, Nida and Pape. According to the popularity indicator, the largest increase in frequency is in the inquiries to define the trips mentioned above. Of the potential Latvian tourist attractions, only one falls into this category - Nyca.

Breaking down the related topics according to narrower quarantine and non-quarantine cycles, it was observed that in the pre-pandemic period (01/03/2019 / 10/03/2020) the most popular topics, potentially referring to tourism, were on the list of the most popular topics, but they were not very popular. The topic 'Riga' had an indicator of 8 (out of 100), 'Jūrmala' (4), 'Ventspils' (4), 'Pape' (3), 'Liepoja' (3), 'Nida' (2), 'Kuldyga' (1), 'castle' (1), 'Daugavpils' (1), 'sea' (1). However, already during that period, a growing trend in their popularity was observed. The topics: 'Liepaja', 'Nida', 'castle', 'Daugavpils' demonstrated a breakthrough, 'Jurmala' by 300 percent. We observe a similar situation by analysing the related inquiries in the period before the pandemic (2015-09-01 / 2020-03-10) only one of the most popular related inquiries was recorded: 'Pape', and the number of the growth of popular inquiries was not recorded. This shows that the interest in tourism (mainly recreation by the sea) had quite strong growth trends in Lithuania even before the pandemic.

During the first quarantine period (2020-03-11 / 2020-06-15), travel-related topics in fact disappear from the list of the most popular topics. The topics 'recreation' and 'Riga' each have a rating of 2 out of 100. The general topics about the country, the Latvian nation and language, as well as the topics 'Poland' and 'Estonia' dominate. Although, among the popular topics, the topic 'rest' showed a breakthrough. However, this is most likely due to the very small number of inquiries and the novelty of the topic, which allowed it to be fixed as a "breakthrough" topic. Interest in Latvia during the first quarantine period is also shown by the fact that the Google Trends was short of data to identify the most popular and the growing popular inquiries.

We observe a completely different situation in the period after the first quarantine (2020-06-16 / 2020-11-10). Topics related to tourism in Latvia returned to Lithuanians' Internet searches.

In the list of the most popular topics appear new inquiries, such as 'travel', 'camping', 'distance'. The list of potential Latvian tourism objects includes Liepaja, Pape, Sea, Riga, Sigulda, Ventspils, National Park, Nyca, Jurkalne and Rundale. According to their popularity, the "breakthrough" is recorded in the themes 'Sigulda', 'National Park', 'Nica', 'Jūrkalne', 'Rundale', and incidence of the topic 'Liepaja' increased by 250 percent. The most popular inquiry – 'Latvia quarantine' (the only one breakthrough of this period has been recorded), also partly points to the growing interest of Lithuanians in Latvia for tourism purposes.

During the second quarantine period (2020-11-11 / 2021-06-10), the search trends are similar to the first quarantine period. The number of searches fell very sharply. Among the most popular topics, the only one that is potentially related to tourism is 'travel'. Although this topic is in the fifth most popular topic, its rating is only 7 points out of 100. The growth of interest in Latvia in Lithuania is observed at the end of the quarantine period (approximately from mid-May 2021). The topic 'travel' shows 60% increase and the request 'can I go to Latvia' is the single most popular related inquiry during this period.

The period after the second quarantine (2021-06-11 / 2021-10-30) was similar to the one after the first quarantine. Only the interest in traveling to Latvia is lower. In the period after the first quarantine, 24 most popular and 20 growing popular topics were identified. In the post-second quarantine, meanwhile, these numbers were 16 and 10, respectively. Other popular topics related to traveling in Latvia were: 'Riga', 'Jurmala', 'Liepaja', 'the sea', 'QR code' and 'camping'. Of these, a breakthrough was recorded in the themes 'Jūrmala', 'Liepoja', 'the sea', 'QR code' and 'camping'. The growth of trips from Lithuania to Latvia during this period is also shown by the most popular inquiries. As many as 4 of the most popular inquiries are 'trip to Latvia', 'trips to Latvia', 'is it possible to travel to Latvia', 'for travellers to Latvia'. Others ('QR code in Latvia' or 'quarantine in Latvia') are also related to the intention to travel. Inquiries for 'trips to Latvia' and 'for travellers to Latvia' have been recorded as breakthrough ones.

In the period after the second quarantine, the number of topics marking Latvia as a transit country for Lithuanians' travelling increased significantly. If in the period after the first quarantine the most popular topic was the name of another country - Estonia, which was not among the most popular topics. In the period after the second quarantine, Estonia, Sweden and Norway were mentioned in the list of the most popular topics. There was a breakthrough in the search for 'Norway'.

2.2.2.2. Latvian's interest in Lithuania

During COVID, Latvians' interest in Lithuania was relatively lower than Lithuanians' in Latvia. During the entire period of operation of Google Trends (since 2004), the highest fixed interest in Lithuania was in April 2004 - July 2006, when this indicator reached 100. During the pandemic period (March 2020 - October 2021), the highest interest in Lithuania was in August 2020, when this indicator reached 50 and in July and August of 2021, when this indicator was 38-39.

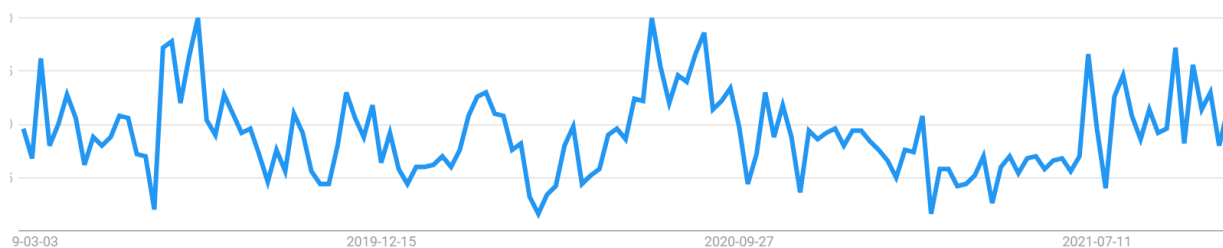


Fig. 4. Interest in Lithuania (search term "Lithuania") according to Google Trends data (March 2019 - October 2021).

It can be noticed that during the study period (March 2019 - October 2021) (Fig.4) the growth of interest is always observed during the summer, but the interest in 2020 was not substantially higher than in 2019. And the interest in 2021, after the second quarantine is lower than in 2020. It should be noted that during the pandemic (during the breaks between the quarantine periods) the interest in Lithuania in Latvia may only last slightly longer than in 2019. In 2019, the peak of interest was on June 23 - July 27, while in 2020 it included the periods of 19 July - September 5, and in 2021 - 4 July - October 2. The lower interest in Lithuania in 2021 compared to 2020 correlates with the total quantitative flows of tourists, which (as well as the reasons for their change) are discussed in the section "General Tourism Statistics".

The interest in Lithuania in Latvia during the whole period under study is basically similar in the terms of general change trends, but is significantly higher than the interest in the other neighbouring country- Estonia (Fig. 5). The average interest in Lithuania (average 45) is higher than in Estonia (average 18).

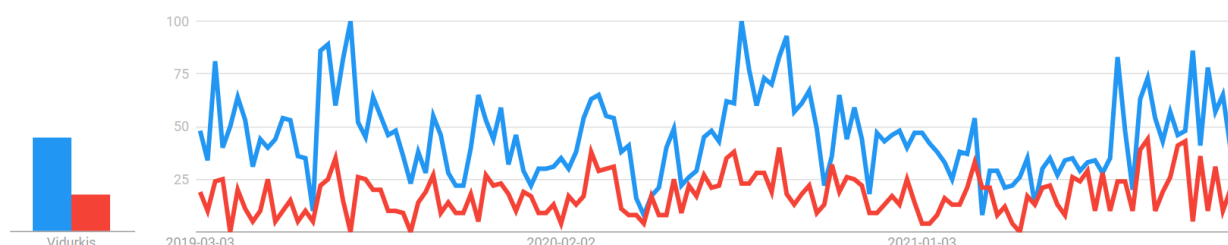


Fig. 5. Interest in Lithuania and Estonia (search term "Lithuania" is in blue and "Estonia" is in red) according to Google Trends data (March 2019 - October 2021).

During the whole period from 2004 and during the research period, the interest in Lithuania (search term "Lithuania") basically correlates with the most important places visited by Lithuanian travellers, as if demonstrating the readiness of Latvians to receive tourists from Lithuania and their expectation for these tourists. Throughout the period since 2004, the interest was the greatest in the municipalities of Dobele, Bauska, Nyca, Jelgava, Sigulda, Saldus and Stopiniai. During the study period the interest was in Dobele (indicator - 100), Bauska (87), Nyca (76), Saldus (63) and Stopiniai (63) municipalities.

The distribution of counties changed at different stages of the study period. In the period before the pandemic (01/03/2019 / 10/03/2020), the municipalities of central Latvia (Jelgava, Olaine, Dobele, Tukums) were among the most interested; during the first quarantine period (November 11, 2020 / June 15, 2020), the municipalities whose residents are most interested in Lithuania 'peppered' all over Latvia (Cēsis, Tukums, Bauska, Liepāja and Rēzekne); when the opportunity to travel

reappeared (2010-06-16 / 2020-11-10) and again the municipalities waiting for travellers from Lithuania (Bauska, Saldus, Dobele, Ventspils, Jūrmala) dominate.

We could interpret these municipalities as being closer to large Lithuanian cities (such as Šiauliai), which are a potential destination for travellers from Latvia. This could partly indicate a small dependence between the possibility to travel and the interest in Lithuania in some border regions of Latvia. However, in Latvia we do not record such interest of border regions in the neighbouring country as it is recorded in Lithuania. The mentioned tendencies are also confirmed by the second quarantine (2020-11-11 / 2021-06-10) and the opening of the travel space after it (2021-06-11 / 2021-10-30).

During the quarantine period, searches from different distant regions of Latvia (Priekule, Bauska, Kuldīga, Saldus, Limbaži, Sigulda, Dobele) are relatively increasing again, and after the quarantine, the municipalities of Dobele, Nyca, Saldus, Dobele and Tukums dominate.

The main related topics and related inquiries identified in the searches on Lithuania in Latvia also differ significantly. First of all, there are significantly fewer of them than searches for Latvia in Lithuania. Throughout the study period (March 2019 - October 2021), the most popular topics related to Lithuania in Latvia were focused on the search for information about Lithuania as a country, the Lithuanian language, COVID. Potential Latvian's travel destinations in Lithuania are indicated by the related popular search terms: 'LIDL' [supermarket chain], 'Vilnius', 'Klaipėda', 'SPA', 'Kaunas', 'Dino ZOO', 'Telšiai', 'dolphin', 'tourism'.

Among the most popular topics are the topics related to the network of LIDL supermarkets, which are mentioned even three times in the list of the most popular in different ways, but in the third, fourth and eleventh places of the most popular topics. During the study period, a breakthrough was recorded in the topics 'Dino Zoo', 'Telšiai', 'dolphin', and 'tourism' potentially related to a travel in Lithuania. Interest in the topic 'Kaunas' grew up by 60 percent. Also, in addition to Lithuania, there is potential interest in other countries (Austria, Estonia, the Baltic States), which are mentioned among popular and growing popular topics. This is confirmed by a survey of the most popular related inquiries. Among them, in addition to many inquiries about COVID (which may also be related to a travel, such as 'covidpass lithuania') the following inquiries dominate: 'lidl lithuania', 'griubaupusties lithuania' (hotel and leisure e-shop), 'nida lithuania'. Of these, in terms of popularity, the breakthrough is shown by inquiries related to COVID (8 out of 9 related inquiries with a fixed breakthrough), as well as "griubaupusties lietuva".

While breaking down the related topics according to narrower quarantine and non-quarantine cycles, it was noticed that in the period before the pandemic (March 1, 2019 / 2020-03-10) the most popular topics potentially referring to tourism showed intensive shopping trips from Latvia to Lithuania. In the list of popular topics related to Lithuania, we have even three names of supermarkets: twice mentioned 'LIDL' (second and third most popular topics), 'Norfa' (15 most popular topics) and 'Maxima group' (18 most popular topics). The list also includes the topic "fuel", which also potentially refers to shopping trips. Another potential form of tourism from Latvia to Lithuania is water recreation and entertainment tourism (related topics 'SPA' (5 most popular topics), 'aqua park' (19 most popular topics). There are mentioned potential visiting places in Lithuania: Palanga, Vilnius, Šiauliai, Biržai and potential tourism objects: 'zoo', 'tower'. The breakthroughs of these topics during the period were shown by the related topics 'Norfa', 'Biržai', 'tower', 'Maxima grupē', 'aqua park'. Interest in the topic 'Palanga' grew by 650 percent, 'Vilnius' - by 90 percent. We observe a similar situation by analysing related inquiries in the period before the pandemic (2015-09-03 / 2020-03-10), only one most popular related inquiry was recorded – 'lidl lithuania', and there were no growing popular inquiries recorded. This shows that the interest in shopping trips (mainly in the Lidl retail chain) had a fairly stable situation and strong growth trends in Latvia before the pandemic. During the first quarantine period (2020-03-11 / 2020-06-15), interest in Lithuania in Latvia is falling sharply. There are only 4 popular related topics left: 'Lithuania' (as a country), Estonia (as a country) and twice repeated 'LIDL'. None of the topics related to Lithuania are gaining popularity. The list of the most popular related inquiries continues

to be dominated by 'lidl lithuania'. Low interest in Lithuania during the first quarantine period is also shown by the fact that Google Trends lacked data to identify popular requests.

We observe a slightly different situation in the period after the first quarantine (2010-06-16 / 2020-11-10). LIDL remains as one of the most popular topics. Some topics related to tourism in Lithuania appeared in Latvian searches on the Internet. The list of the most popular topics includes 'SPA', 'Palanga', 'Šiauliai', 'Klaipėda' and 'DinoZoo'. The topics 'SPA', 'Palanga' and 'DinoZoo' show a breakthrough. The most popular inquiries are partly or directly related to travel: 'lithuania covid', 'COVID -19 lithuania', 'lidl lithuania'. The breakthrough of none of the related inquiries was fixed, only the popularity of pandemic-related queries has increased.

During the second quarantine period (2020-11-11 / 2021-06-10), the search trends are similar to the first one. The number of searches falls down very sharply. Among the most popular and growing popular topics, there are no longer topics potentially related to tourism. There are also no more such inquiries in the list of popular and growing popular inquiries.

The analysis of the data after the second quarantine (2021-06-11 / 2021-10-30) reveals that Latvians' interest in Lithuania as a tourist destination is not recovering, except for shopping trips. Therefore, the situation is different from the period after the first quarantine. In the period after the second quarantine, only 8 most popular and 3 growing popular topics were identified. In the period after the first quarantine the numbers were 12 and 7, respectively. The popularity of the topic 'travel' grew by 180%. The small increase in travel from Latvia to Lithuania during this period is also shown by the most popular inquiries related to the management of a pandemic in another country. The topic - the "covidpass lithuania", is not only the most popular, but its growth shows a breakthrough.

2.3. Interview with the manages of the largest museums and their representatives in order to find out what strategies museums have used to attract tourists from neighbouring countries

Interviews with the managers of three national and two republic level Lithuanian museums and their representatives revealed different strategies and the museums' attention to neighbouring audiences.

The National Museum of Lithuania indicated that their main foreign visitors are visitors from Lithuania's neighbouring countries: Poles, Latvians and Estonians. During the pre-pandemic there used to be many tourists from Scandinavian countries and Germany. The results of an internal survey of the Lithuanian National Museum showed that tourists from neighbouring countries were the first to visit the capital and the museum during the pandemic year, as soon as opportunities to travel and cross borders freely became possible. Visitors from the neighbouring countries understand and are close to the heritage the museum communicates, as those countries have many common historical moments and experiences. There is a growing interest in the expositions of Gediminas Castle, the defensive wall bastion, in the New Arsenal, the newly opened House of History, where the latest international exhibitions of the museum are presented.

The Lithuanian National Museum is also presented in the Latvian media. It should be mentioned that on the Latvian online portal Delfi.lv the Department of History of the Lithuanian National Museum is included in the list of expositions recommended for visiting in Lithuania. The museum also holds exhibitions with common historical memory with Latvians and Estonians. To mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Baltic Way, a virtual exhibition was created together with Latvian and Estonian colleagues, which can be seen in Lithuania and Latvia, and can be viewed at Gediminas Castle. Next to the virtual exhibition an installation was also created, where visitors can stand next to people from historical photographs of Latvian participants of the Baltic Way. During the pandemic lockdown, the Lithuanian National Museum of Art expanded the digital museum services: there was introduced a new electronic ticketing and accounting system, and their virtual

tours were a success. The Lithuanian National Museum of Art does not apply a special communication strategy aimed at attracting neighbouring tourists. It focuses on a wide multilingual audience. The different languages of guided tours are focused on individual visitors: Lithuanian, English, Russian, Italian, French and German. The Lithuanian National Museum consists of 11 different branches, which are located in different, sometimes geographically distant and remote parts of Lithuania, therefore, it can offer expositions of different content, which due to the cultural similarity are not foreign or incomprehensible to the citizens of the neighbouring countries.

This is proved by the joint exhibition 'Wild Souls. The Art of the Symbolism of the Baltic States', presenting the 'Gold Fund' of the Baltic Art of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The exhibition was curated by the famous symbolist researcher Rodolphe Rapetti (France). It was first exhibited in 2018 at the Orsay Museum in Paris to mark the centenary of the Baltic independence. In the same year, the exhibition was moved to the KUMU Museum in Tallinn, and in 2020, in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the restoration of independence of the Baltic States, it was exhibited at the LNAM Art Gallery in Vilnius and the Latvian National Art Museum in Riga. The Lithuanian National Museum of Art has also joined the international project *the Baltic Way*. One of its stations is the LNAM Palanga Amber Museum.

The M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art has not previously singled out tourists from neighbouring countries, although it acknowledges that this should be done. Attention could be shown through the provision of certain information, audio guides in the languages of neighbouring countries, etc. The museum's perspective plans foresee giving more emphasis on the regional media and communicating information specifically for the regions.

The M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art notes that the content communicated by this national museum is diverse, and the history of Lithuania and Latvia is analogous and adequate, and many parallels can be drawn that may be interesting to visitors from neighbouring countries.

Regional communication aimed at neighbouring countries is often conditioned by the geographical location of Lithuanian museums and the most important transport routes. This is also confirmed by the representatives of Šiauliai Aušra Museum, as according to them, Latvian tourists have long been the target group of the museum. Before the pandemic year, representatives of the museum together with Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre participated in the tourism fairs *Adventures* in Vilnius and *Balttures* in Riga. The communication department of the museum is constantly working and offers information packages to Latvian portals and news services. Those packages are related to the latest information about the museum, the latest exhibitions, and educational activities. It is evident that this information reaches visitors.

The museum aims to provide visitors with the information in several languages and adapts the content for visitors of all ages. It was noticed that the most visited Latvian tourist attraction is the Bicycle Museum, which can probably be explained by the fact that the museum is mostly visited by families.

One more the most favourite and most visited museum is the Lithuanian Maritime Museum in Klaipėda, which has attracted many groups of tourists of all ages from Latvia. The museum notes that it works with individual tourism companies that transport Latvian tourists, and invites Latvian journalists to specially prepared presentations, thus forming the visitor's initial impression of the museum. In recent years, the museum has been communicating information not only about protected and displayed wildlife, but also emphasizing other, more historical topics, such as: 'Lithuania - a maritime state', 'With the sea we are bigger', and the history of interwar Lithuanian shipping 'From a plough to a helm'. It is noted that even in these newly created thematic expositions, it is impossible to disassociate from the consideration of the history of the neighbouring countries.

All Lithuanian museums unequivocally note the negative consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic for the sector. The Museums point out the complete loss of organized visitors in 2021, *i.e.*, tourist groups, and at some stages groups of school children, which used to significantly increase the number of museum visitors. Compared 2021 to 2020, the museum was only visited by individuals or families from abroad. The Maritime Museum conducted a geographic survey that in summer of

2020, 40 percent of the visitors came from abroad and 60 percent were locals. Of those 40 percent about half were visitors from Latvia. In 2021, the Maritime Museum received only 10 percent visitors from abroad, and 2-3 percent of visitors from Latvia.

Comparing the seasons of 2020 and 2021, Šiauliai Aušra Museum states that in 2021 it received only one-fifth of the number of visitors compared to 2020. The National Museum notes that compared to the statistics of 2019, a 70 percent drop in number of visitors was recorded during the recent year of pandemic. At the same time, the growth of local and national tourism is noted. The Lithuanian National Museum of Art records a 50 percent or more drop in number of visitors.

All the surveyed institutions noted that the Baltic travel bubble formed in 2020 gave positive results to the entire museum sector. An increase in the number of tourists from neighbouring countries traveling from Latvia, Estonia and Poland was recorded in all interviewed museums. Therefore, the representatives of the museums note that it was an excellent communication tool with the practical benefits of increasing the number of visitors, which should have a solid basis for further development.

The museums, having lost foreign visitors, began to communicate nationally and with local communities more actively, looking for new forms and methods of expression. The National M.K. Čiurlionis Art Museum notes that it has turned to local communities, the increase of which in 2021 was clearly recorded by the museum.

During the pandemic year, museums are experiencing a great increase in digital content, active use of social networks and other video platforms (such as separate YouTube channels of institutions). Remote lectures, video tours, virtual exhibitions, digital games (such as the Kahoot app, or other specially designed apps) were used to maintain the educational content. There was a shift to distance learning activities, which individual school children classes were able to order (and this option remains to this day). The events of museums (exhibition openings, conferences, joint projects) were transferred to the virtual space and remote format. Museums have tried not to lose and at the same time strengthen their connection with the national audience. Naturally, there was much less international communication.

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