

Reconstruction of Ukraine and Strengthening of the Civil Society: 10 Fundamental Principles by Ukrainian Museums for the Ukraine Recovery Conference, June 11-12, 2024 in Berlin

Foreword

Rebuilding Ukraine is a need not only for Ukrainians, but also for the entire international community. There are many aspects to the reconstruction of Ukraine. All of them need to be considered in order to build an even better Ukraine for the future. This includes the physical reconstruction of a partially destroyed country. This includes strengthening the proper functioning of institutions and eliminating corruption at all levels. This also includes considering changed priorities of the Ukrainian population, psychological and physical effects the war has caused in different ways and the fact that Ukrainians gained a much stronger self-perception as a nation.

An important issue is to think about what Ukrainians expect from their future and how orientation can be provided for this discussion. This is specifically what museums do. According to the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation's research on the state of culture in 2022-2023, the cultural heritage sector turned out to be one of the most resilient: it ranks second after the audiovisual industry. That means, it is worth putting the stakes on it. Ukraine has qualified human resources, but much of the rest of resources is lacking.

Therefore, museums should play a crucial role in rebuilding Ukraine, and they should be better included in various programs of the reconstruction of Ukraine.¹ That is why we, the museums in Ukraine, are reaching out to the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC) with 10 fundamental principles on how to better incorporate museums and other civil society institutions into the process of rebuilding Ukraine – not just as it was, but as a better place to live, to work and to visit. We call on international donors and the Ukrainian government to consider our proposals and to better involve museums in further discussions and programs.

The Current Situation for Museums in Ukraine

Russia's war against Ukraine is not only about conquering our country. It is about the destruction of our culture and national identity. Therefore, from the very beginning, the museums of Ukraine and other cultural and historical institutions and objects became a target for the Russian aggressor.

In the currently occupied Ukrainian territories on the Crimean Peninsula, in the southern parts of Ukraine and in Donbas, Russia has committed and is continuously committing war crimes by systematically looting and deporting priceless artifacts.

¹The state of culture and creative industries during the war - the results of a study by the

Ukrainian Cultural Fund and the MCIP of Ukraine - <https://ucf.in.ua/news/11082022>

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OБMIN

In addition, museums throughout Ukraine are deliberately shelled and bombed. The National Literary and Memorial Museum of H. S. Skovoroda, the Lviv Historical Museum (branch), the Ivankivsky District Museum of Local Lore, the Odesa National Art Museum - these examples vividly testify to the special cynicism and deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage of Ukraine by the troops of the aggressor. Precisely targeted hits of museums took place on important, symbolic anniversary dates. It needs to be emphasized that, in addition to the destruction of premises and collections, museum employees are killed while performing their duties and trying to save museum collections as, for example, the director of the Kupyansk District Museum of Local History, Iryna Osadcha, who was trying to evacuate a part of the collection when a direct hit of a Russian missile destroyed the museum.

Today there are 45 national museum institutions, 570 state and communal museums, 1141 museums set up as branches or separate units in Ukraine. Currently, 102 museums and galleries have already been damaged, of which 12 were completely destroyed. The largest number of partially damaged museums are to be found in the Lugansk region (40%), the Donetsk region (18%), the Kyiv region (14%) and the Kherson region (12%). In the Kharkiv region, at present 207 cultural sites are damaged as a result of Russian shelling, continuous artillery and air attacks.

According to the information of the regional and Kyiv city military administrations, since the start of the full-scale invasion and as of April 25, 2024, the number of damaged cultural heritage sites in Ukraine is 1,062 objects. Out of them, 123 are of national and 864 of local significance.

There are 90 museums located in the temporarily occupied territories. In five de-occupied regions of Ukraine it was discovered that 34,872 exhibits were stolen from 8 state and communal museum institutions. During the process of occupation of Ukrainian territory, "local" monitoring of "ownerless" cultural values is carried out by representatives of the occupiers, shadowy structures, "black" archaeologists who loot in these territories, which are temporarily out of Ukrainian control.

According to the information posted on the official website of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, in 2022 it issued 104 permission documents to 50 persons to carry out archaeological excavations in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which is a vivid confirmation of the gross violation of the norms of international law and national legislation of Ukraine.

Even under these most terrible circumstances, museums throughout Ukraine continue working:

They are open to the public as much as possible.

They developed new narratives and concepts using the experiences of visitors and employees.

They reflect the changing expectations, fears and hopes of visitors and workers alike.

Even destroyed and occupied museums continue functioning - thanks to innovative online initiatives and the prompt restoration of exhibition spaces in compliance with safety requirements, examples being the Okhtryka Museum of Local History, the Chernihiv Regional Art Museum named after H. Galagan, the Kharkiv Literary

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OБMIN

Museum and dozens of others.

The work of museums is also affected by the fact that many in particular male employees are called to defend their country. In the currently occupied territories, employees either have to find ways to continue working under occupation, or were forced to flee and continue working from other parts of Ukraine.

All this leads to the fact that today, even more than ever, museum work is performed mainly by female teams.

Provision of additional opportunities (online courses) or scholarships for museum workers who are currently mobilized would allow them to continue professional development, combining it with service in the Armed Forces. Currently, they are deprived of the opportunity to maintain their professional qualifications.

What Museums give to the Society

Museums are an integral part of an open society - not only to preserve the past in all its diversity, but also to reflect today's experience and prepare the future of our societies.

Rebuilding Ukraine requires large investments to renew and improve housing, factories and infrastructure. Museums are part of this infrastructure – not only in the sense that they are part of local architecture and city planning, but even more because they are part of the living ecosystem where national, regional or local authorities and civil society meet.

Museums are a place where young people and adults experience traditions and what made us who we are today. They offer direct contact with what remains of our history and what we want to remember. This is our historical memory, including history in all its aspects: art, literature, technology and much more.

Museums provide now a major platform for the reintegration of various categories of our fellow citizens - veterans, disabled people, their families, families of the deceased, internally displaced persons of various age categories.

During and after the war, museums have an even greater responsibility to society: they offer a place for open exchange of views, for questions, and for joint efforts to find a way into the future.

The Role and Responsibility of Museums for the Future of Ukraine - Changed Expectations

Even now museums face changing and growing expectations from many sides: what museums show and how they do it needs a narrative reflecting the radically changed situation in Ukraine: people are looking for ways to interpret their daily experiences, the terrible losses and traumas they have to go through. Many museums have already adapted their exhibition concepts. They must also find ways to deal with injured and traumatized visitors and employees.

Both the authorities and the society expect that the museums will provide orientation and an opportunity to reflect on the experience, and discuss ways to fight trauma and

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OБMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OБMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OБMIN

choose a better future.

The reconstruction of Ukraine involves a new way of cooperation between the authorities and the civil society. Ukrainians have been proving for many years that they are ready to fight for Ukraine's victory and to make Ukraine an even better place to live. Authorities at national, regional and local levels accepted the brutal challenge to overcome the destruction and to lead towards victory in war and the reconstruction of Ukraine. At the same time, civil society in all its many facets has matured even more: Ukrainians not only understand that they need to fight for the independence of their country, but also that the civil society should play an even stronger role in the future of Ukraine.

Rebuilding Ukraine will not be a copy-paste of what Ukraine was prior to the Russian aggression. Ukraine will be a nation of people determined to live according to democratic values, to be the basis of power and to be the engine of change in the society. Museums are indispensable in serving as a forum for this mature civil society.

- **At National Level**

Ukraine already has a rich culture of national museums important for the entire nation. These museums not only need funding to continue and improve the way they work, they need to be involved in discussions and decision-making at the national level when it comes to topics and responsibilities assigned to the museums. This includes discussions about our national heritage as well as discussions about the conclusions we draw from the experience of war. The following topics should be reviewed: What makes us Ukrainians today and tomorrow? How do we see ourselves and how should we perceive how others see us? How do we interpret the experience of previous generations? What should be the Ukraine we dream of? How do we get there? What can we learn from each other? Where do we agree or disagree, and why? What is our place in Europe and the world? What do we bring to the common European cultural heritage? How will we live with our neighbors – regardless of our desires, including Russia?

The search for answers to these urgent questions continues within the Ukrainian society. Cooperating with foreign experts, the way of finding and formulating new narratives would be prompter and more thorough.

- **At Regional and Local level**

At regional and local level, some of these responsibilities for museums correspond with the aforementioned questions. However, some are specific: What creates our local identity? What unites our local and national identity? How can we enrich others in Ukraine and abroad? How can we help to build a strong local civil society and to ensure the proper functioning of institutions? In a positive sense, museums in an open society are the guardians of the space for interaction, dialogue and finding solutions. Open societies are defined by how much freedom they allow museums. In dictatorships like Russia, museums are just a transmission belt for the authorities to control society (propaganda). In a democracy, museums are part of the civil society, supported by the government to play their role. In Ukraine, some still need to fully acknowledge that.

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

Thus, museums are responsible to civil society and to the government. The reconstruction of Ukraine should involve museums, particularly at regional and local level: in discussions directly relating to the reconstruction of municipalities and regions, or in the way museums should reflect the changing needs of people.

In a very direct manner, Ukraine must become an even more inclusive country, starting with providing access to people with various disabilities. Museums should also accept this challenge by modernizing or reconstructing their buildings accordingly and highlighting topics that are important for the Ukrainian society.

Inclusion should become a guiding principle at all levels of decision-making. It also means giving space to different experiences Ukrainians gained during the war: fighting directly with the enemy or working to make Ukraine function; loss of family members or property; staying in Ukraine or returning from abroad; living in occupation or not; having different ideas about what Ukraine should be or become. All of these will be topics that museums will have to address in one way or another, particularly at regional and local level, where people experience these topics very directly and often in a harmful way. The case of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War and other museums is quite illustrative: they are constantly holding commemorative events and thus strengthen the trust of veterans and families of deceased or wounded warriors in cultural institutions as the best option for remembering what happened and to find a way to deal with these experiences.

Cooperation with the Government and Civil Society Institutions in Ukraine and Abroad

Ukraine has a powerful network of civil society organizations both in Ukraine and abroad. This includes museums and their networks: along with the rich and multifaceted landscape of museums in Ukraine, there are Ukrainian museums outside of the country, for example in New York, Chicago, Toronto or Winnipeg. Moreover, museums in Ukraine have already established strong ties with partner museums in Europe and beyond. These connections must be continuously strengthened, systematized and expanded: it is obvious that the contribution of Ukrainian history, art and culture to the common European cultural heritage is not yet as visible throughout Europe as it should be. Partnerships with museums, specifically in Europe and North America, need to be strengthened on a bilateral basis, on equal terms: museums in Ukraine can learn a lot from how other museums work, create narratives or use new technologies to modernize museums, more interesting and relevant for visitors of all age groups. At the same time, museums outside of Ukraine could benefit from a better reflection of the Ukrainian contribution to their own narrative.

Together, this makes a significant contribution to Ukraine's future and should be actively supported by governments in Ukraine and beyond.

10 Fundamental Principles

1. Rebuilding Ukraine requires thinking about how we want to perceive Ukraine in the future: preserving what was valuable and improving what makes our country an even better place to live, work or visit. Planning at national, regional and local

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMИH. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OБMIN

levels should better include civil society and cultural institutions, especially museums, from the outset. Each region requires a different approach and has different needs. Therefore, we suggest that at every administrative level in Ukraine, there should be proper and systematic forms of involvement of the museums and other institutions of the civil society in discussions and decision-making on how to rebuild Ukraine. Museums, based on existing experience and their collections, can support this important discussion, for example, with exhibitions, conferences, etc. on related topics, thereby becoming platforms for a safe professional dialogue. The development of systematic forms should be based on increasing the autonomy of museums and museum organizations, on a critical analysis of the existing legislative framework and the creation of a roadmap for changes while considering new practical experience as a result of the war and other successful experiences worldwide.

2. The reconstruction of Ukraine will make it a much more inclusive society: this becomes especially obvious when we think about how we will make life easier for those of our people who are suffering from the physical or psychological consequences of this war.

Making Ukraine the best country in the world for people with disabilities is a positive challenge. Museums should reflect this need – by creating wheelchair-accessible buildings, adapting the way exhibitions are planned and presented (for example, making them accessible to people with hearing disabilities etc.) or offering opportunities to artists with disabilities.

A separate challenge exists for museums located in buildings that are objects of cultural heritage: here the restoration with adaptations for people with disabilities needs to be done according to what the protection of the building allows. It is also worth emphasizing that inclusivity involves not only an infrastructural component, but also a cultural one. Successful examples of cooperation between Ukrainian museums from currently occupied and front-line territories in safer locations demonstrate the integration of collections in new regions, for example, the activities of the Sloviansk Museum of Local Lore together with the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum or the Luhansk Regional Museum of Local Lore, working first in Lviv and now in Kyiv.

This concept should be implemented everywhere and by every institution in Ukraine.

3. Rebuilding Ukraine will bring new narratives: both within Ukraine and beyond. Museums can make an important contribution to the discussions e. g. on the following topics: how do we see ourselves as Ukrainians? How do others see us and how would we like them to see us? What do we want to bring to the world? In Ukraine this requires a broad dialogue, which must be well structured and supported by the government, regional and local authorities. We call for a comprehensive and structured way for this discussion, including museums and other institutions of civil society.

The reconstruction of Ukraine must include a self-reflection on what museums we have today at national, regional and local level, and what museums we would like to see in the future in order to better present what made Ukraine the country it is

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OБMIN

today. This should happen in a good mix of local initiatives and joint decision-making at all levels.

This discussion should also go beyond Ukraine: outside of Ukraine too often we are still faced with ignorance or misunderstanding of Ukrainian art and culture, either not showing anything related to Ukraine in museum exhibitions, or neglecting the Ukrainian element in a work of art or an artist's biography. Therefore, we call for a systematic dialogue with museums outside of Ukraine for a better display of this common heritage. Such dialogue should include opportunities for joint study and rethinking of museum collections both in Ukraine and abroad (decolonization), the formation of cross-cutting research programs and the creation of networks of local museums, etc.

4. Rebuilding Ukraine requires a program of modernization and professionalization for many of our museums. Museums should step into the 21st century. Rebuilding Ukraine is an opportunity to turn museums in Ukraine into the most modern, most visitor-oriented in the world. The experience of war has already forced many museums to radically change the way they work: some museums from currently occupied territories have already moved their activities from physical buildings with physical exhibits to interactive online platforms.

In any case, museums of the 21st century all over the world need significant changes if they want to remain relevant to our societies. Our societies are evolving, technologies are developing, narratives are changing – all of this creates new opportunities. Ukraine should become the driver of such a museum modernization requiring a constant increase in the expertise of museum professionals. This can be achieved by developing and implementing modern educational programs with the involvement of domestic and international experts, specifically, in the field of restoration, exhibition design, digitalization, legal aspects of international interaction, diversification of funding sources, etc.

5. While rebuilding Ukraine, it is necessary to preserve what is good and strong in our country. This includes our often rather small local and regional museums. They are close to people and to the needs of their communities. They survive mainly by the engagement of volunteers and benefactors. They need space to live and expand. This includes adequate funding as well as respect and general support from local and regional authorities.

We know that money will be needed everywhere and for many needs in Ukraine. Therefore, we propose to create a national fund of small and medium-sized local and regional museums, which could be financed by private benefactors in Ukraine and abroad. The creation of such a fund can also become a basis for support for museums and museum professionals from currently occupied territories, since they have the potential to become a driving force and a point of communication during reintegration.

6. Rebuilding Ukraine must be visible both inside the country and beyond. Therefore, we propose to create exhibitions and interdisciplinary platforms that will reflect various elements of the reconstruction of Ukraine, to demonstrate them in various locations both in the country and abroad. Our museums can support the

* This text is an internal document and is the property of Fundacja OBMIN. In case of publicity, please name the source (OBMIN Foundation, www.obmin.eu).

OBMIN

creation of such exhibitions and offer bridges to partners outside of Ukraine.

7. The reconstruction of Ukraine will largely depend on the youth. That is why we offer special programs and concepts for young people in Ukraine. Cultural heritage programs must be included in all levels of education. It is also worth emphasizing the need to popularize studies of museology in order to expand the number and qualification of experts. Not only visiting museums, but also using museums in different ways should become part of our future education system. More and better online museum activities would make this possible wherever young people in Ukraine need such access. In tomorrow's Ukraine, having full access to our rich culture and heritage should no longer depend on where you live or whether you can afford to travel to big cities with big museums.
8. The reconstruction of Ukraine should have a special European aspect. Ukraine will become a member of the European Union. We need to think about how to bring Ukraine closer to other Europeans. This may include the establishment of Ukrainian museums in other parts of Europe. It could also mean using modern technologies to better present Ukraine to Europe. The European Union and Ukraine are called upon to create such an initiative, providing suggestions on how best to achieve this.
9. Rebuilding Ukraine must include a security aspect, specifically in the domain of cultural heritage. Awareness of a wide range of permanent threats, from wars to natural and man-made disasters, should form the basis of developing a clear roadmap for preserving the historical and cultural heritage that museums concentrate. This includes the creation of a system of secure external servers for the preservation of our digitalized heritage and a national effort to quickly and completely digitalize all museum content and the forming of a network of reliable storage facilities with the necessary technical equipment, which can become local hubs for securing collections in the event of a threat.
10. Reconstruction of Ukraine should cover all aspects of history, art and culture. Therefore, we ask international donors, governments and private institutions to include history, art and culture in their concepts to support the reconstruction of Ukraine. We ask them to involve museums and other institutions of civil society in the creation and implementation of their programs. Museums are important partners in making Ukraine a role model for what a society can achieve by advocating freedom in all its aspects.