



CULTURAL HERITAGE GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT IN ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

Abstract: The article revises the cultural heritage governance systems in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Given that they have deployed the same models during their Soviet past and that they started similar reforms in the sector after re-gaining their independence, a comparative analysis using general museum data is made in order to establish whether they develop similarly since then. Based on the presented statistics, the Estonian cultural heritage sector is dominating its Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts in terms of investments in museums, their curatorial activities and in terms of the cultural participation of the population in the form of museum visits. Additionally, Lithuania manages to ensure higher number of museum attendance than Latvia, but fails to ensure higher output of the professional museum work in areas such as publications and educational programmes.

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Introduction

The cultural heritage governance in the Baltic republics – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania experienced a major change in the last 30 years. The change was not only due to the re-gaining of independence of those nation states from the Soviet Union, shifting the historical narrative from one centred on close links with everything Russian, to one denying the positive influences of the Rus, Russia, the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. On a second level the change dealt with the total withdrawal from the Marxist reading of their heritage and the adoption of rather nationalistic approach. That promotion of “mono-culture” affected all historical activities in its wide meaning, including rewriting of text books after fall of the Soviet Union (Novak & Plets, 2020, p. 7).

Even though that the current official reading of the cultural heritage governance during the time of the USSR in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is that there was a strong Russification attempt promoted by the Communist party and ensured through the total control over the respective national heritage, there could be some positive examples listed. In Estonia since 1960s a shift towards protecting whole building ensembles, villages and manors instead of single houses occurred (Toms, 1987) as cited by (Kallast, 2020, p. 2). Further, the non-governmental sector was initiated during the Soviet times with the creation of the Soviet Fund for Culture in 1986 – initiative set by the wife of the then-Communist leader Gorbachev, Raisa Gorbacheva and George Soros. The fund raised money for local monuments and museums and supported private collectors, which were not looked upon well in the Soviet system. However, some systemic problems continue to affect those nation states until now. An example of that is the neglect by the historical narrative to assess fully the Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust, which led to the killing of more than 95% of the Jews living in Lithuania during the Nazi occupation (Rindzevičiūtė, 2011, pp. 530, 528).

The changes in the cultural heritage sector after the re-gaining of independence for the Baltic republics in the 1990s were not easy. The initial years of Estonian independence put the cultural heritage to a risk due to the low public participation and the low political priority (Bardome, et al., 2020). The Planning Act of 2002 has integrated heritage into the comprehensive municipal spatial plans rather late (Hansar, 2006) as cited by (Kallast, 2020, pp. 257-258). Latvia experienced a severe shortage of specialists for restoration activities (Lazdius, et al., 2020, p. 22). Thus, with the comparison of those nation states and their modes of cultural heritage management, some notions could be made on the positive and negative outcomes from their initially similar policies.

Comparative analysis between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

The comparative analysis between the models of cultural heritage governance of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could be made by using statistical data on their museums, their respective curatorial activity and the museums attendance numbers (EGMUS, 2021). As it could be seen by the Tables 1. and 2., Estonia presents far greater numbers in terms of the professional activity of the museums. Additionally, the museum visits are greater if extrapolated to the population. Even though Lithuania is growing in terms of visits more than Latvia, it is less performing in terms of publications and educational programmes. To some extent that could be also attributed to the lower numbers of employed staff at the museums which is specialized, a tendency which, as presented by the numbers below, is shifting as almost all the newly employed staff is specialized.

Table 1. Number of museums and museum staff in the Baltic republics

		Population in 1000	Number of museums	Number of museum staff	Number of specialized museum staff
Estonia	2014	1314	256	2.118	1.518
	2015	1314	255	2.076	1.551
	2016	1315	246	2.340	1.769
	2017	1317	242	2.124	1.538
	2018	1321	250	2.381	1.687
	2019	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Latvia	2014	2001	147	1.911	907
	2015	1986	149	1.933	934
	2016	1968	151	2.005	930
	2017	1950	151	2.034	945
	2018	1934	153	2.047	962
	2019	1919	153	2.055	977
Lithuania	2014	2.943	104	3.140	1.053
	2015	2.921	104	3.245	1.096
	2016	2.888	103	3.288	1.219
	2017	2.847	104	3.321	1.252
	2018	2.808	104	3.404	1.320
	2019	2.794	107	3.436	1.351

Source: EGMUS

Table 2. Curatorial activity and museums attendance in the Baltic republics

		Temporary exhibitions	Number of museums with at least one publication	Number of museums with at least one special museum education programme	Number of visits in 1000
Estonia	2014	1.795	110	152	3.398
	2015	1.750	112	154	3.253
	2016	1.551	113	153	3.456
	2017	1.423	107	164	3.426
	2018	1.606	109	164	3.384
	2019	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Latvia	2014	1.083	80	112	2.970
	2015	1.129	72	103	3.259
	2016	1.180	66	122	3.534
	2017	1.146	79	126	3.714
	2018	1.100	79	131	3.759
	2019	1.066	64	132	3.712
Lithuania	2014	1.796	56	97	3.757
	2015	1.835	63	96	3.896
	2016	1.881	73	95	3.981
	2017	2.018	72	98	4.152
	2018	1.964	69	100	5.026
	2019	1.878	65	102	5.588

Source: EGMUS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Estonian cultural heritage sector is dominating its Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts in terms of investments in museums, their curatorial activities and in terms of the cultural participation of the population in the form of museum visits. Additionally, Lithuania manages to ensure higher number of museum attendance than Latvia, but fails to ensure higher output of the professional museum work in areas such as publications and educational programmes. Further research is needed to establish the reasons for these disparities in the development of the cultural heritage sector in the Baltic republics.

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