RESEARCH REPORT "RELATIONS BETWEEN MUSEUMS AND SOCIETY"

Summary

Introduction

The Law on Museums, passed by the Saeima in 2005, defines tasks and functions of public and state accredited museums and marks them as institutions that serve society and its development.[1] In the past few decades the involvement of museums in various spheres of social life has increased significantly. Today museums are not only key promoters of fine art and culture, but also play central role in regional development by forming and shaping identities, preserving cultural heritage and making it accessible to widest possible audience. Contribution of museums to education is beyond any doubt.

There has been very little research of museum visitors and non-visitors in Latvia, and no systematic inquiry into how museum performance corresponds to interests and needs of various social groups. Also, the importance of qualitative measures of museum performance has not been recognized enough, although it has lately been acknowledged by museums and museologists around the world that only through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures it is possible to assess the actual social impact museums have. This research project "The importance of museums for various target groups: Relation between museums and society", that was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of Latvia and was conducted by the Academy of Culture from March to November 2018, aims to fill this gap and to provide in depth understanding of the social role museums in Latvia play using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Audiences of museums in Latvia has been studied relatively little. This research is the first attempt to do a multilayered analysis of museum audiences, putting statistical data in context of museum sector development from the early 1990s until today, future development trends in Latvia and the rest of the world, and overall changes in consumption of culture. Although the scope of the research is rather broad, the key focus is on the social roles of museum and on relation between museums and society, therefore certain issues, such as , such as museum governance and collection policies, are left unaddressed. Also, it is important to note that state accredited museums in Latvia are very diverse in terms of management, size, scope, and place. Each museum has its own unique mission and a specific target audience. The report mentions specific examples or best practices in Latvian museums to reflect this uniqueness and diversity, but its overall focus is on aspects that are comparable across the museums and not on in-depth analysis of specific cases or specific groups of museums. Finally, it is important to note that, although the main focus of this report is on the state accredited museums, it is acknowledged that these museums compete for audience with numerous other cultural,

[1] Law On Museums. Adoption: 15.12.2005. Entry into force: 17.01.2006.Available: https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/124955-law-on-museums

education and entertainment institutions, including more than 100 non-accredited museums, science centers, art galleries, e.g. players in culture and entertainment field.

Methodology

The research objective was to find out and to analyze what social roles museums play in society, how accredited museums (state, municipal, autonomous, private) address and work with various target audiences, how museum audiences have changed over the past 10 years, and then use this analysis to illuminate main mid- and long-term challenges and to suggest a framework for how social impact of museums might be monitored and measured.

Key topics addressed by the project was: museum visitors and non-visitors, target groups and segments (socio-demographic characteristics, leisure patterns, attitudes to culture and museums, i.e.); motivations and obstacles of museum attendance; the role of museums amidst other culture consumption activities; museum practices for reaching specific audiences (communication and marketing strategies); opportunities for wider audience outreach and strengthening of social impact of museums; measurement of quality of museum performance and of social impact.

Applied methods: data collection combining quantitative and qualitative approaches resulted in multilayered set of information and data, where a synergy of objective measures, subjective opinions, and examples of best practices provide a rich basis for evidence-based policy making. The key quantitative research methods were analysis of museum statistics collected by the Ministry of Culture, a survey of population of Latvia (1040 respondents), survey of museum visitors (529 respondents), survey of museum management (116 respondents representing 150 museums). Key qualitative research methods were in-depth interviews with experts (13 interviews), focus groups with museum visitors and non-visitors (6 discussions), case analysis of specific museum practices (with respect to reaching specific audience), and content analysis of museum missions.

Short description of the museum sector in Latvia[2]

The museum sector in Latvia consists of state, municipal, autonomous, and private museums that are regulated by the Law of Museums. It is a decentralized system. State founded museum can be supervised by the Ministry of Culture or by another ministry depending on the profile of the museum. Municipal museums are founded and managed by municipalities. Autonomous museums are founded and managed by commercial enterprises or by a derived legal person governed by public law (e.g. universities). Only those private museums that

[2] Sources of Information: Cultural Policy Guidelines 2014-2020 "Creative Latvia": Strategy in The Museum Sector, 2015; Webpage of Ministry of Culture (www.km.gov.lv).

are accredited by the state are addressed in the state strategy for the museum sector. There is a significant number of non-accredited private museums in Latvia, but their operations are not specifically regulated.

The Ministry of Culture directly supervises eight state museums and four branches of these museums. It is also responsible for the supervision of the museum sector as a whole. An important sectoral player is the Latvian Council of Museums – a consultative institution that aids cooperation among museums and takes part in strategic planning of sector development. The largest NGO of the sector is the Latvian Museums Association. Other NGOs with significantly fewer members are ICOM Latvian National Committee, the Promotional Society of Museology in the Baltics, and a think-tank "Creative Museum".

State culture policy and development priorities for 2020 are laid out in Cultural Policy Guidelines 2014-2020 "Creative Latvia". The strategy for the museum sector is one the subdocuments of these guidelines. The key task of the strategy is to map out how the strategic goals of "Creative Latvia" are supposed to be implemented in the museum sector. Museum professionals has set the following goal for the museum sector development from 2014 to 2020:

> *"Implementation of the strategy for development of the museum sector in Latvia will ensure necessary preconditions for museums to operate as dynamic, contemporary, inclusive institutions that are in line with needs of society, focused on the use of material and non-material cultural heritage as a source of creativity, national wealth, education, science, and economic development, as well as means of personality enrichment and qualitative leisure opportunity".*

The museum sector in Latvia has undergone significant changes since 1990. The number of visitors diminished dramatically in the early 1990s and graduately increased over the subsequent decades. One of the most significant audience widening initiatives have been the Museum Night. The management and the overall policy of the sector has developed and matured as well. Some museums have been closed, others have been consolidated and some have undergone reconstruction and had acquired a completely new shape and identity.

Timeline of key changes in the museum sector in Latvia, 1992 - 2018

1992	Foundation of the Association of Latvian Museums.
1993	Latvia establishes its National Committee at the International Council of Museum (ICOM)s) and joins the Network of European Museum Organization (NEMO).
1998	The Law on Museums comes into force.
1998	Foundation of the State Culture Capital Foundation with the purpose to support and promote creativity across all sectors of arts and culture, as well as to ensure preservation of cultural heritage and to advance cultural education.
1999	The system of accreditation is put into operation.
2000	Museum studies program opens at the Academy of Culture.
2002	The first initiative of "Museum Spring". Eight Latvian museum get involved in an international initiative organized by the Ministry of Culture and Communications of France. This initiative subsequently transforms into Museum Night.

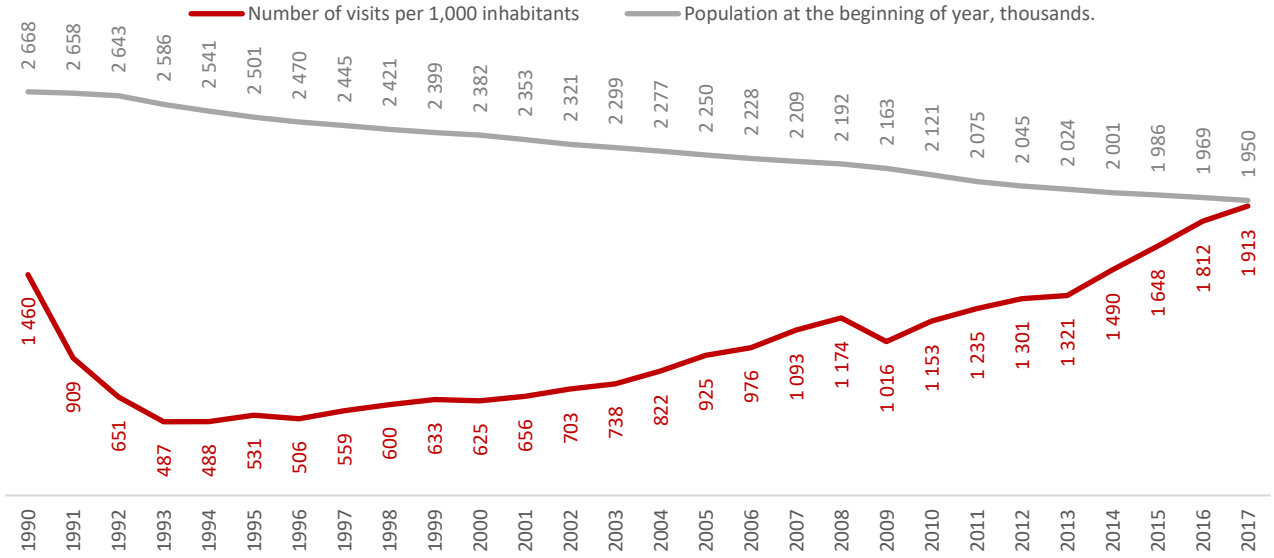
2004	Latvia joins the EU and gets access to the EU Structural Funds for culture development projects. One of the largest projects involves creation of the National Catalogue of Museum Collections.
2004	The first session of the Baltic Museology School – a long-term initiative to advance education of museum professionals in Baltic countries.
2005	The first Museum Night held in Latvia in May 14, 2005.
2006	Amendments of the Law on Museums come into force.
2006	The Cabinet of Ministers approves the Program for Improvement of Cultural Infrastructure 2006-2018 "Heritage 2018" that envisions to reconstruct and modernize all 105 state culture infrastructure objects by the 100th anniversary of Latvia in 2018.
2007	The first stage of the EBRD project "National Catalogue of Museums" completed under supervision of the Center for Culture Information Systems. As a result, a framework for an online data base of museum collection objects is created (www.nmkk.lv).
2008	Global financial crisis results in administrative and financial reforms and severe measures on the national level, the consequences of which are felt until 2010.
2010	The budget of the State Culture Capital Fund reaches its lowest level in 2010 – it is by 72% less than it was in 2008, and by 49% less than it was in 2009.
2012	A record number of 277 488 visitors attend the Museum Night.
2014	Guidelines for State Culture Policy 2014-2020 "Creative Latvia" are approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.
2015	Latvian presidency at the European Council involves an extensive cultural program and a number of traveling exhibitions.
2015	The strategy for the development of the museum sector is approved.
2016	Opening of the reconstructed building of the Latvian National Museum of Art in May 4, 2016.
2016	Reopening of the Riga Motormuseum. After a major reconstruction it becomes the largest and the most modern museum of automobiles in the Baltic region.
2016	Construction of the National Museum Storage Complex in Rigā, Pulka street 8, starts. The storage is planned to serve four museums - the National History Museum, The Museum of Literature and Music, the National Museum of Art, and the Riga Film Museum.
2018	Amendments in the Law on Museums. The definition of the museum changed in accordance with ICOM definition: "A museum is a permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of study, education, and emotional enjoyment, and the primary goal of which is fulfillment of these function and not profit".
2018	Exhibition "Symbolism in the Art of Baltic States" ("Le symbolisme dans l'art des pays Baltes") opens in Orse museum in Paris. It is one of the largest international cooperation projects carried out as the part of 100th anniversary of the three Baltic states.
2018	A commencement of a project "Latvian School Bag" that brings art and culture projects into Latvian schools and gives an opportunity for children and youth to take part in art and culture events as a part of general education framework.
2018	The 100th Anniversary of the Latvian state is celebrated through numerous cultural projects throughout 2017 to 2019. One of the biggest anniversary projects in museum sector is a co-joined exhibition "Latvia's Century" that unites 68 national, municipal, and private museums.

The museum network in 2018 is composed of 28 museums under supervision of the Ministry of Culture, 11 museums under supervision of other ministries, 11 autonomous museums, 6 private museums, 94 municipal museums that are located across Latvia, but most part in Riga or in its vicinity. The total number of museums in Latvia is much larger because it includes more than 100 private museums that have not been accredited and therefore are not included in official statistics.

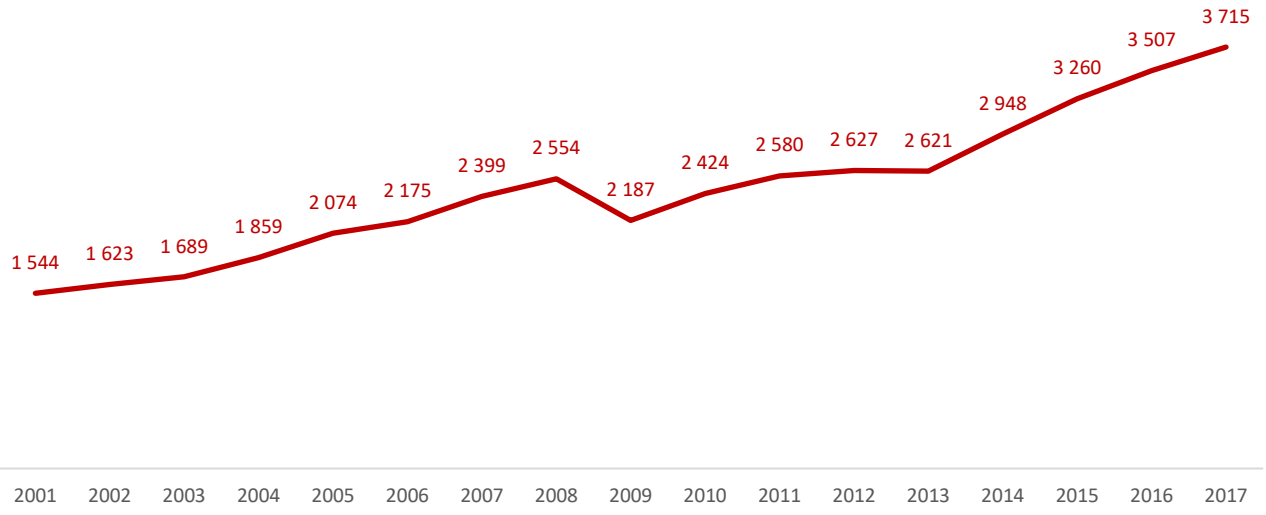
Statistics of museum visits

While the population of Latvia is decreasing, the number of museum visits is going up

Number of museum visits per 1,000 inhabitants and population of Latvia from 1990 to 2017.

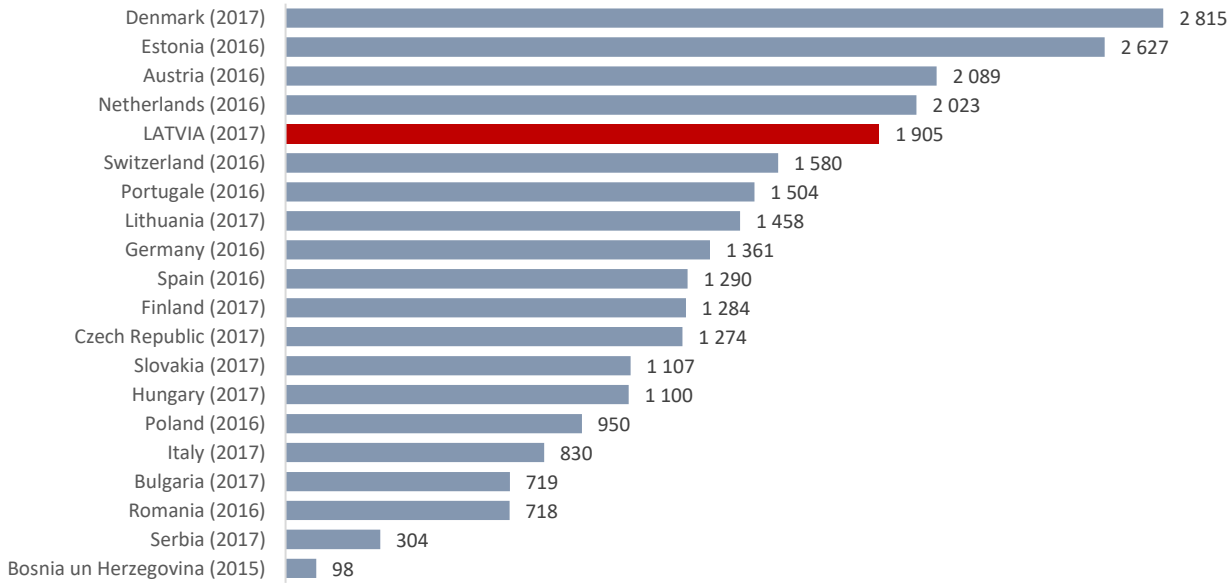


Museum visits 2001-2017, thousands.



Latvia has one of the highest number of museum visits relative to the size of the population in Europe

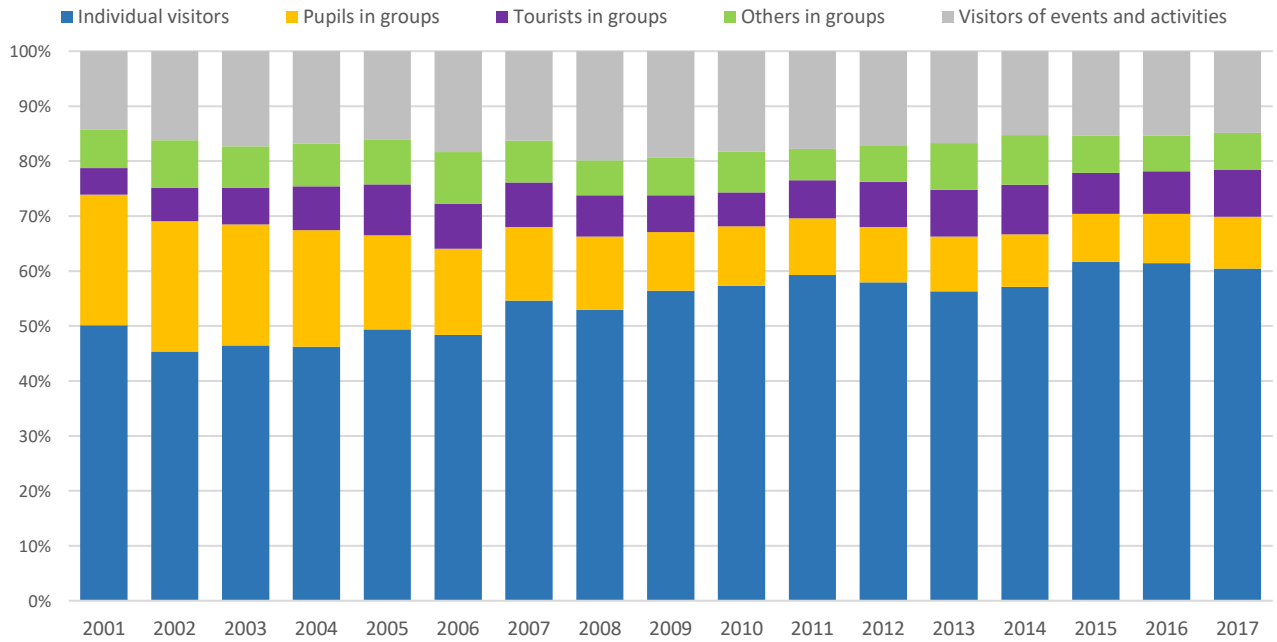
Comparison with other European countries: Museum visits per 1,000 inhabitants



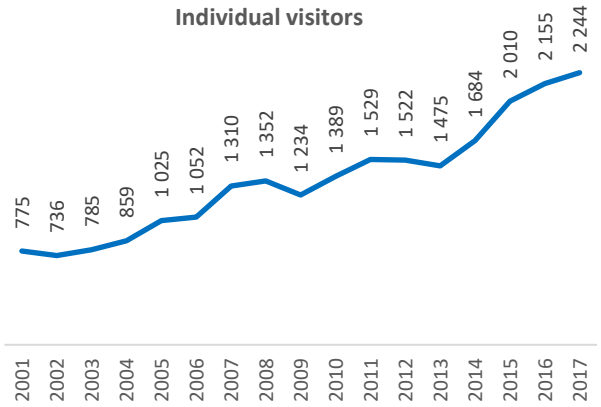
The number of individual visits has increased significantly, while the number of school children groups has slightly decreased

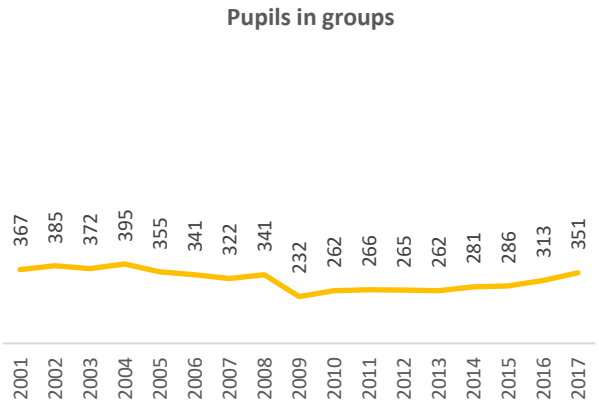
The number of visitors of special events and activities has increased

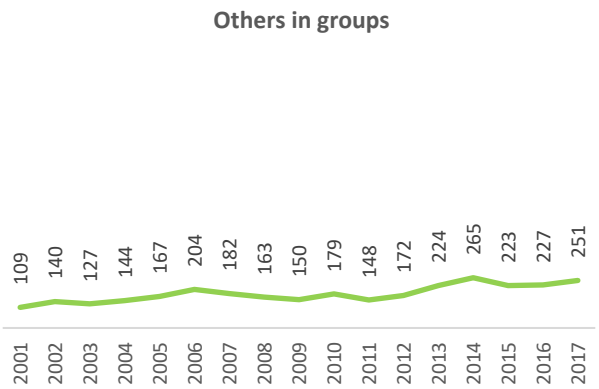
Importance of various types of visitors 2001 -2017

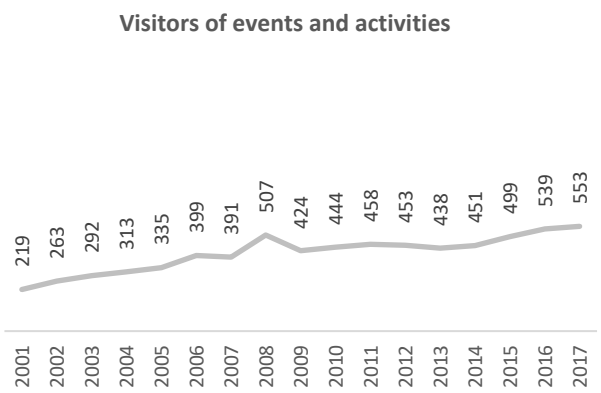


Museum visitors by type of the visit 2001 - 2017, thousands.





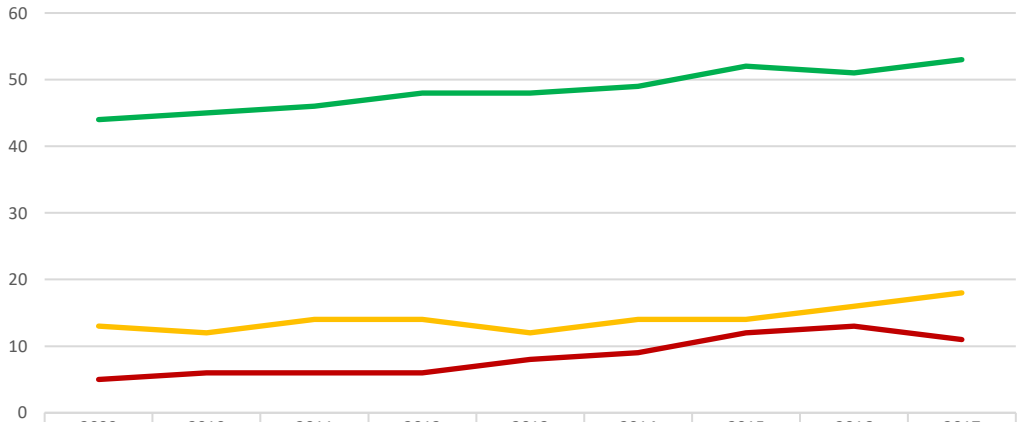




Nine most visited museums make up 50% of total museum visits in Latvia

The number of museums with more than 100 thousand visitors per year has increased significantly.

Museums by the level of annual attendance 2009 - 2017 (number of museums)



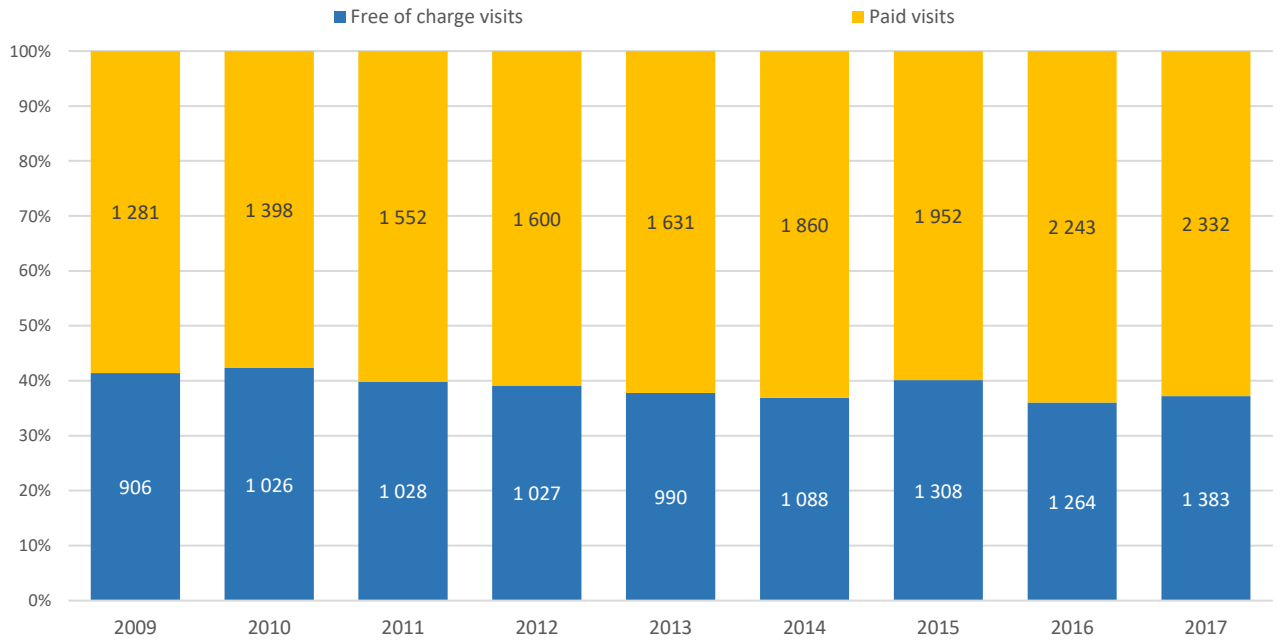
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Over 100 thousand visits	5	6	6	6	8	9	12	13	11
Over 50 thousand visits	13	12	14	14	12	14	14	16	18
Over 10 thousand visits	44	45	46	48	48	49	52	51	53

Museums with attendance higher than 50 thousand visits per year 2009 - 2017

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Turaida Museum Reserve	183 919	192 227	207 472	220 744	232 647	250 492	258 932	262 206	265 352
Rundale Palace Museum	134 877	135 273	225 494	233 792	215 199	258 301	235 695	242 998	255 600
Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation	138 004	138 099	145 773	152 561	176 779	182 882	179 315	191 826	223 379
The Art Museum Riga Bourse	71 354	34 000	68 624	147 508	122 605	128 080	155 819	137 374	222 642
Latvian National Museum of Art	84 605	70 142	99 727	80 622	15 225		125 000	262 321	215 558
Bauska Castle Museum	34 808	35 368	38 699	40 733	37 171	144 302	168 117	187 721	182 837
Rīgas Motor Museum	28 345	49 159	55 009	70 107	42 309	21 170	17 940	115 195	180 582
Latvijan War Museum	76 307	116 694	134 658	116 651	124 557	141 700	160 452	147 953	153 601
Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia	126 257	113 923	113 168	96 323	115 325	119 802	134 765	124 756	137 453
Latvijan Occupation Museum	104 924	242 954	103 249	86 392	72 252	136 045	122 366	102 368	116 631
Cesis History and Art Museum	70 672	68 823	84 253	79 311	90 704	95 784	97 892	104 361	100 869
Ventspils Museum, Seaside Open-Air Museum	44 349	66 200	92 719	33 021	110 246	87 510	101 481	106 356	96 565
Latvian Museum of Natural History	87 710	85 091	93 852	100 743	108 312	100 131	104 684	101 148	91 030
Valmiera Museum	58 121	52 053	68 525	70 250	69 104	80 562	96 504	91 000	85 013
Museum of Decorative Arts and Design	77 516	84 765	62 473	81 036	92 419	72 896	120 898	80 259	84 689
Latvian Museum of Architecture	10 400	10 700	10 185	11 505	10 975	11 150	10 207	13 430	58 400
Ventspils Museum, The Castle of the Livonian order	69 860	31 269	32 688	40 725	43 332	39 192	38 269	53 311	57 113
Latvian Railway History Museum	19 067	20 650	22 423	24 757	28 367	37 021	42 226	49 976	50 175
Exhibition Hall "Arsenals"		28 391	46 766	50 371	45 484	59 267	42 003	31 007	42 283

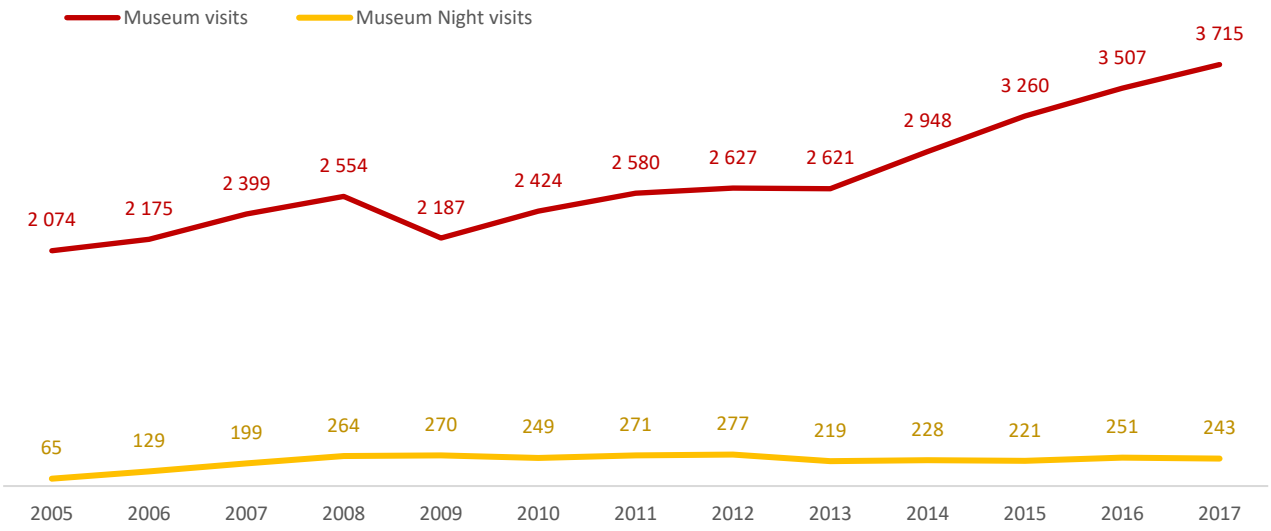
The proportion of free of charge visits is going down in the long-term.

Number of paid and free of charge visits as a proportion of total number of visits 2009-2017



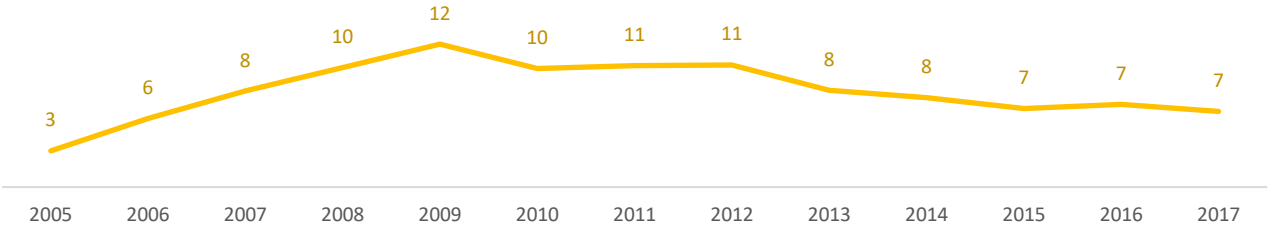
The share of visits during the Museum Night in the total number of museum visits gradualy diminishes.

Museum visits and Museum Night visits 2005 - 2017, thousands.



The Museum Night visits as a proportion of total museum visits 2005 – 2017.

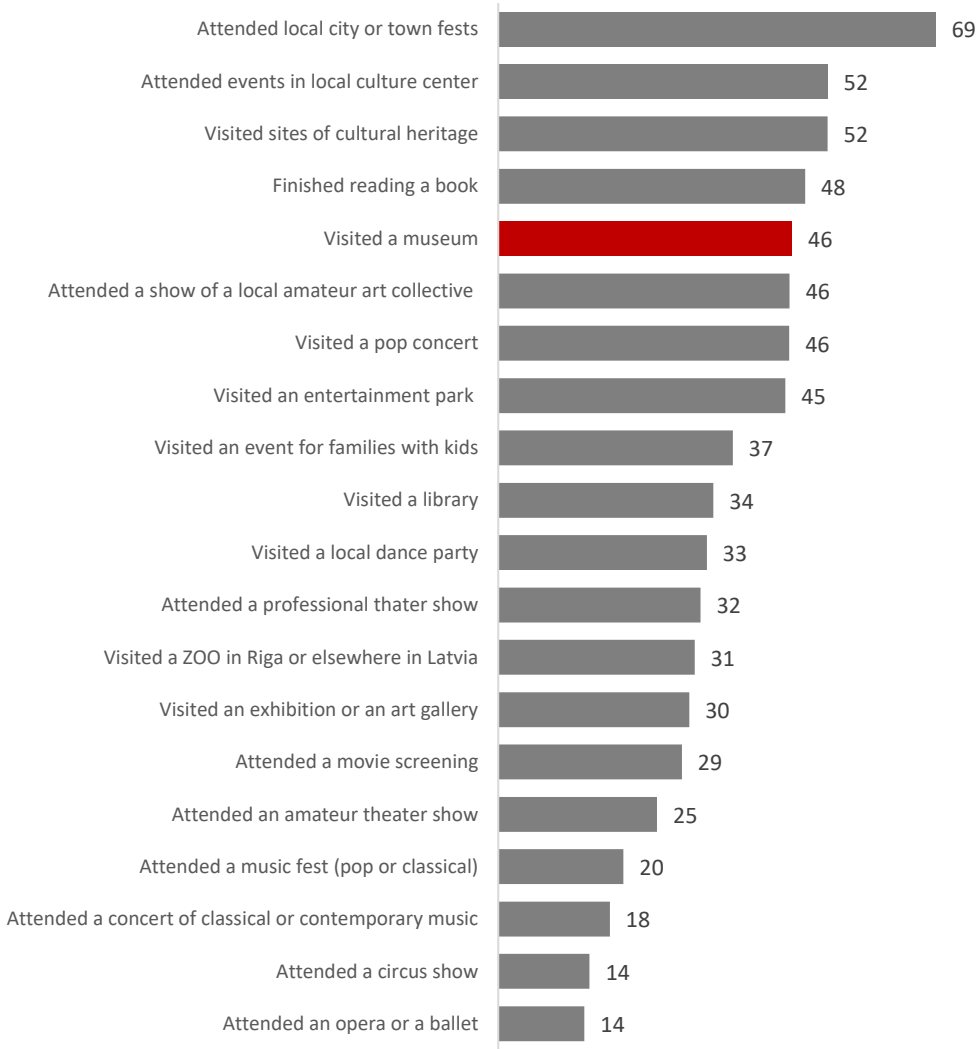
Data source: Latvijas muzeju parvalde (2001 - 2008), Latvijas digitala kulturas karte (2009 -2017), data collected by the Ministry of Culture, calculations done by the authors.



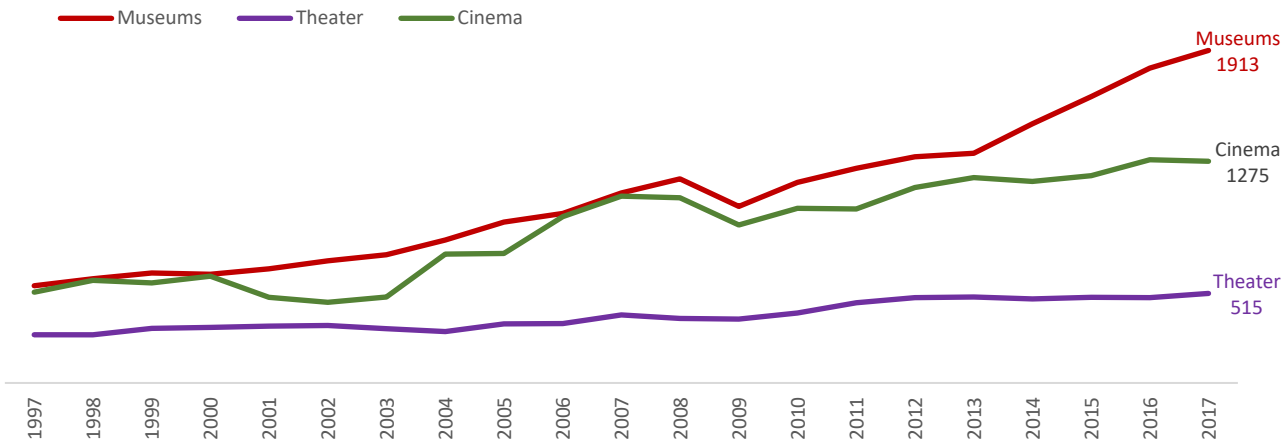
Characteristics of museum visitors and non-visitors

Visiting museums is among the most favorite means of culture consumption for inhabitants of Latvia

Survey: Culture consumption by population of Latvia (%)

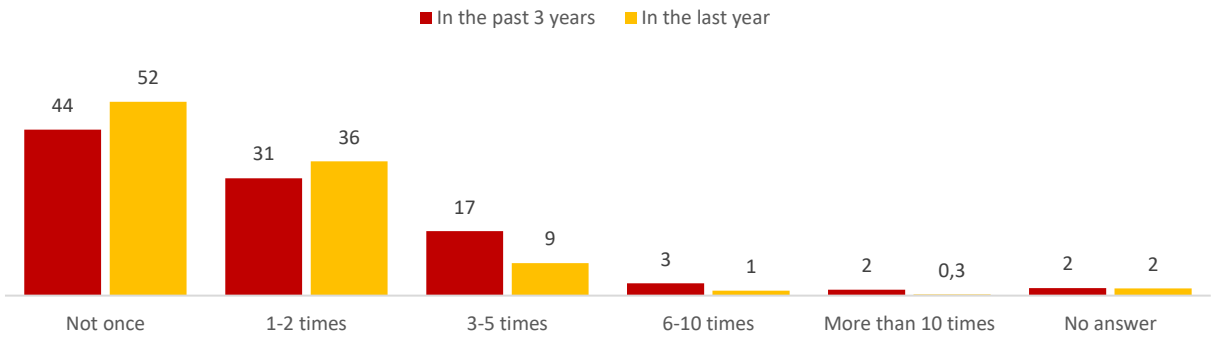


Statistics: Visits to state accredited museums, theaters, cinemas per 1,000 of inhabitants 1997 - 2017



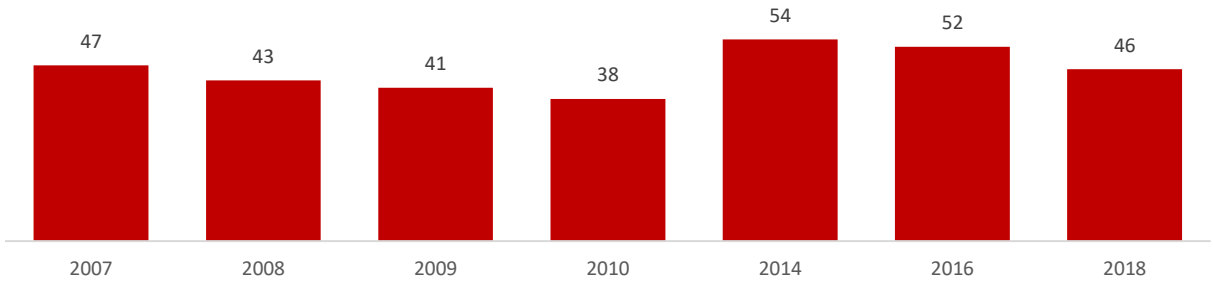
Many Latvians go to museums, but they do it on rare occasions

Survey of Latvian population: Frequency of museum visits (%)



In a long-term the number of visitors does not increase, but increases the frequency of their visits

Survey of Latvian population: Proportion of museum visitors 2007 – 2018 (%)



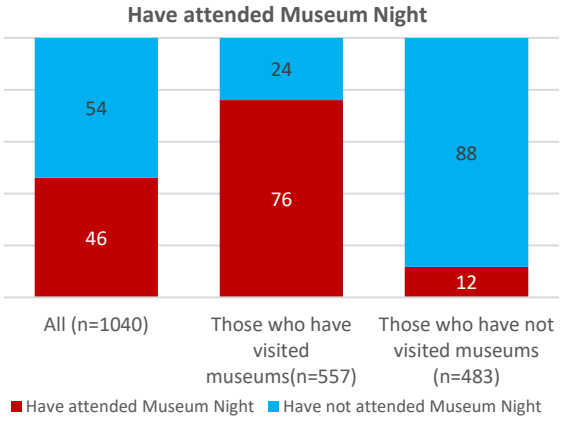
About a half of Latvian population has attended the Museum Night

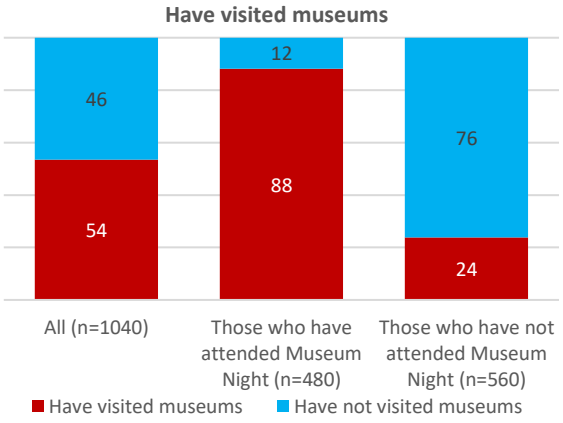
Survey of Latvian population: Attendance of Museum Night (%)

The Museum Night attracts a very small number of new visitors

Museum Night does not stimulate to visit museums on a regular basis.

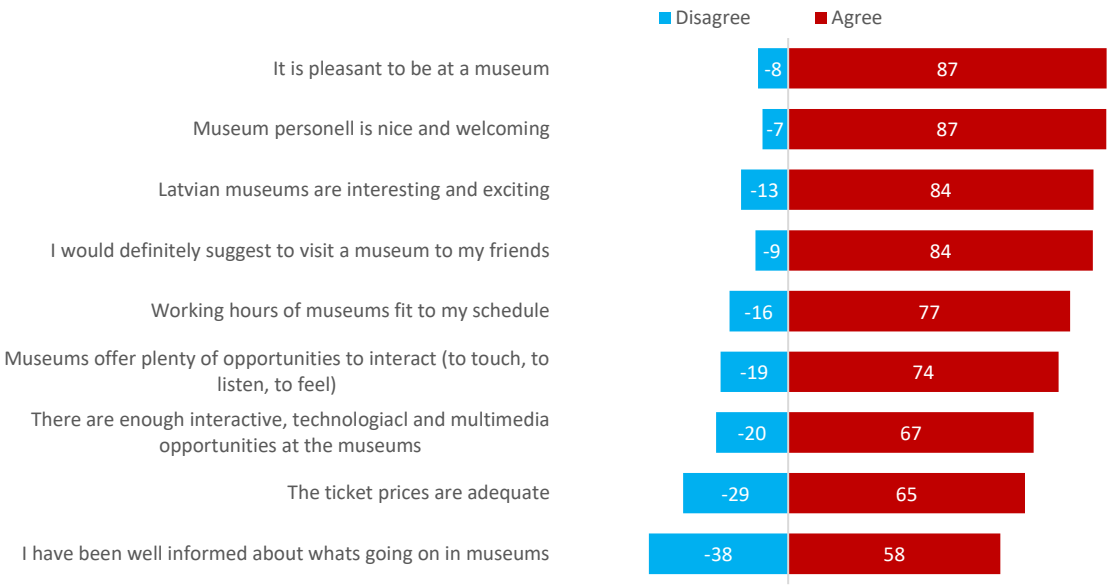
Survey of Latvian population: Relationship between museum attendance and attendance of the Museum Night (%)





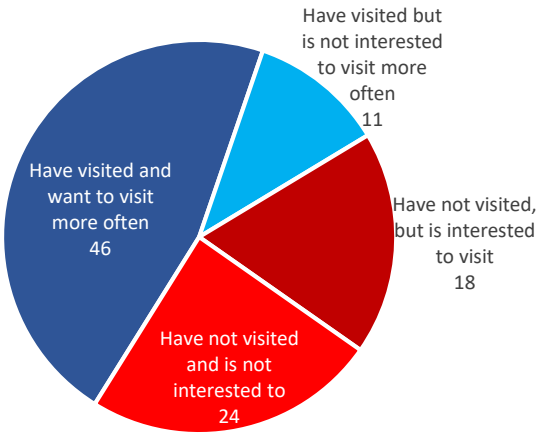
Museum visitors feel very positive about the opportunities offered by museums, but many feel not enough informed about them.

Survey of Latvian population: Detailed evaluation of museums (%)



Every fourth inhabitant of Latvia is not interested in museums, two-thirds might be motivated to visit more regularly.

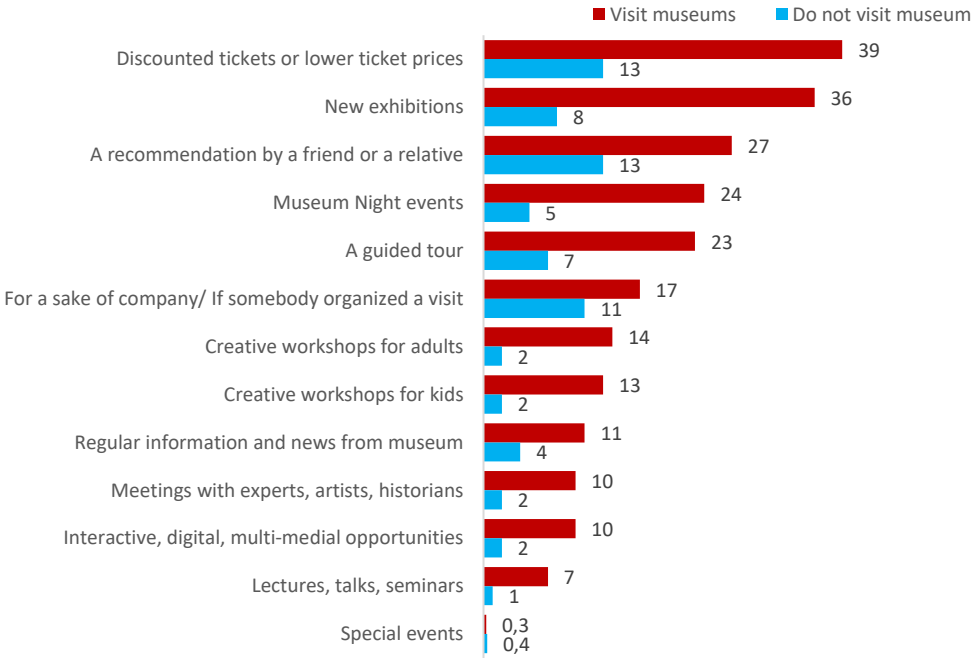
Survey of Latvian population: Potential to motivate current visitors and non-visitors to visit museums more regularly (%)



Lover ticket prices, new exhibitions, and recommendations by friends and relatives are main motivating factors for visiting museums more often.

More than one-third of current non-visitors might be motivated to visit a museum.

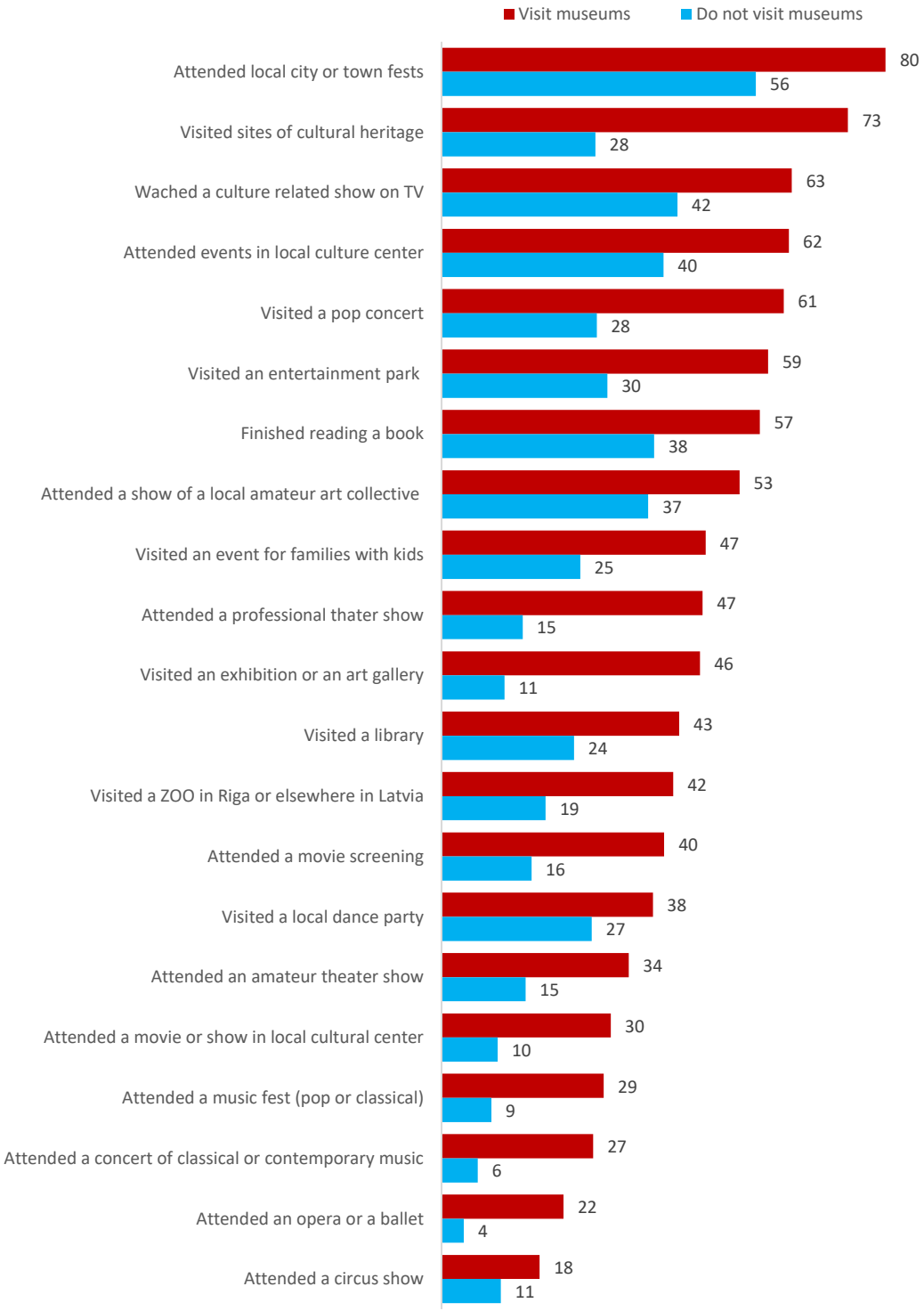
Survey of Latvian population: Potential motivators for more frequent visits (%)



Those who visit museums are also more active consumers of other cultural products and acttivities.

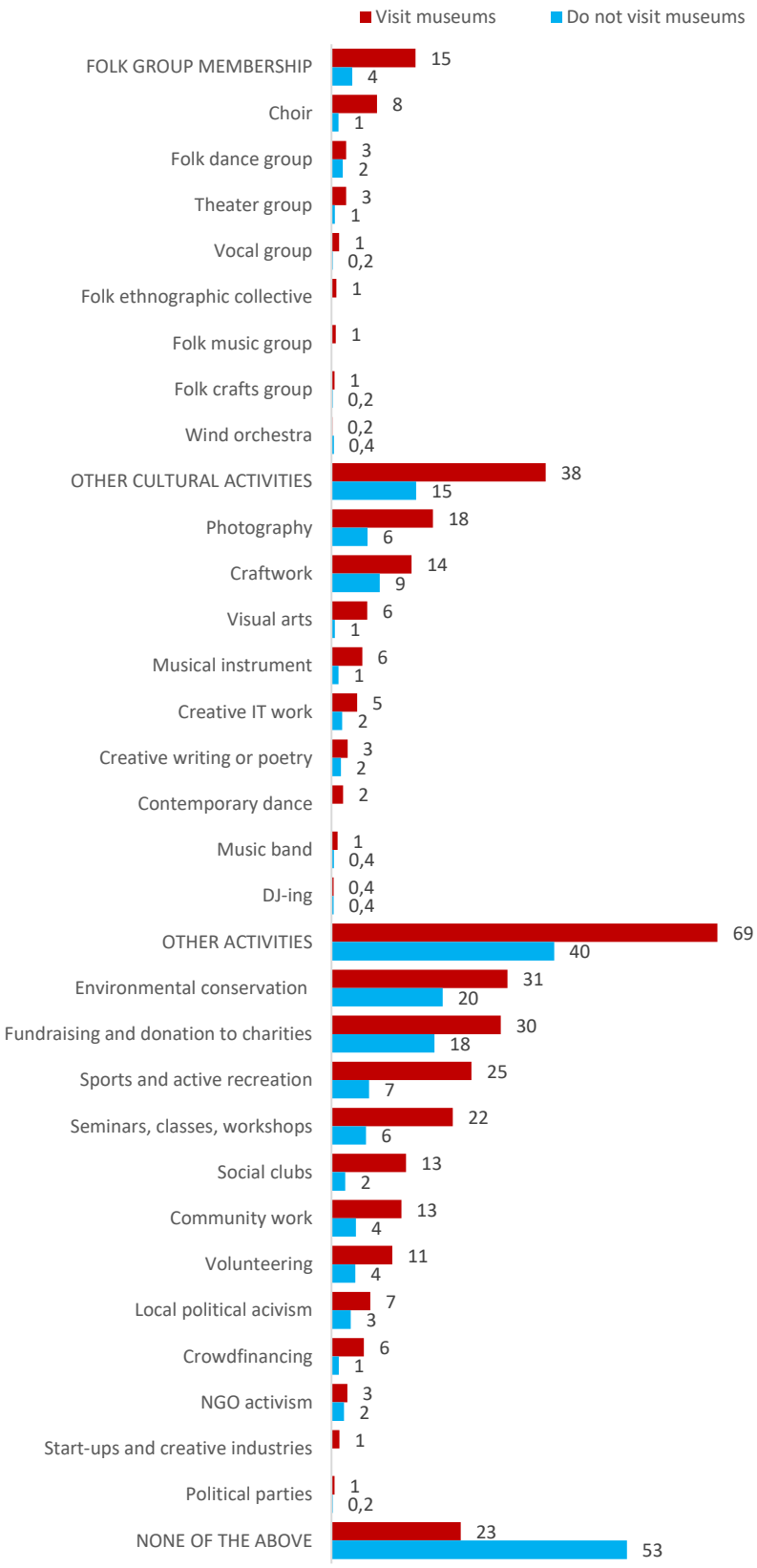
Museums do not compete with other types of cultural consumption. Non-visitors tend to prefer to spend their free time outside the field of culture.

Survey of Latvian population: Culture consumption by museum visitors and non-visitors (%)



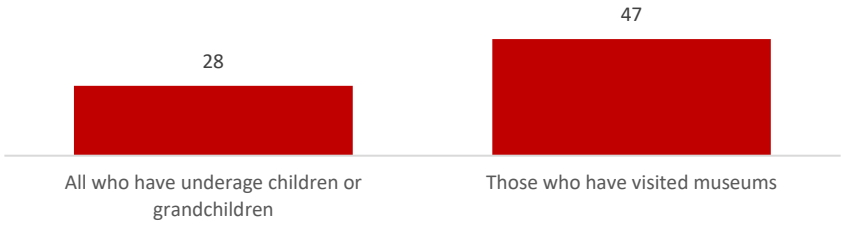
Museum visitors take very active part in cultural and social life.

Survey of Latvian population: Culture participation by visitors and non-vistors (%)

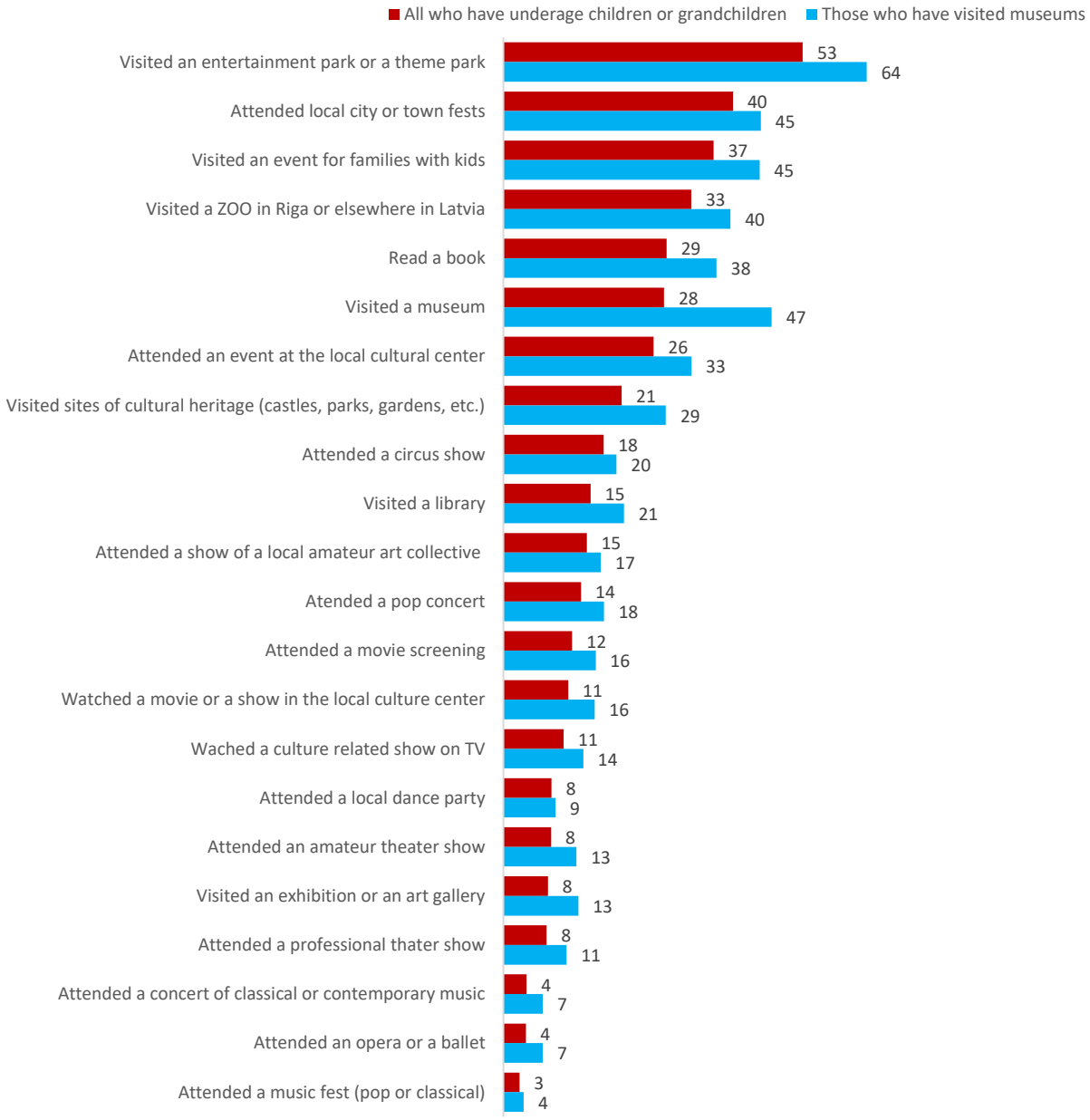


Museums are rarely visited together with children

Survey of Latvian population: Museum visits accompanying children or grand-children (%)

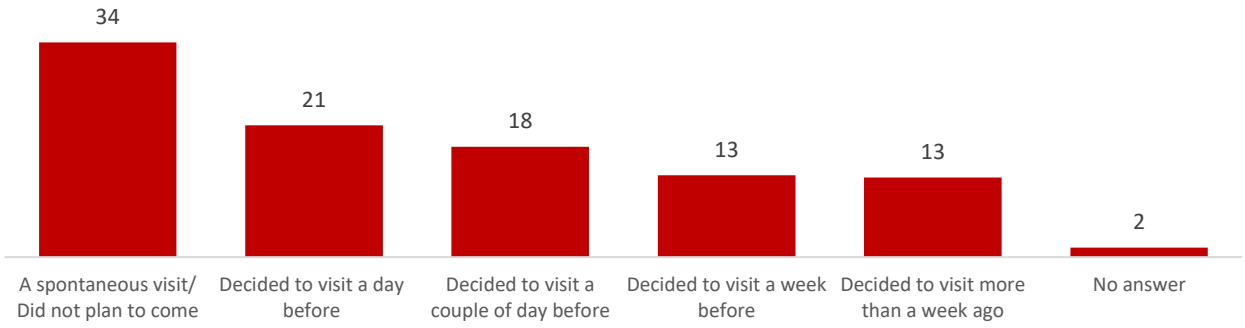


Survey of Latvian population: Culture consumption together with children and grandchildren (%)



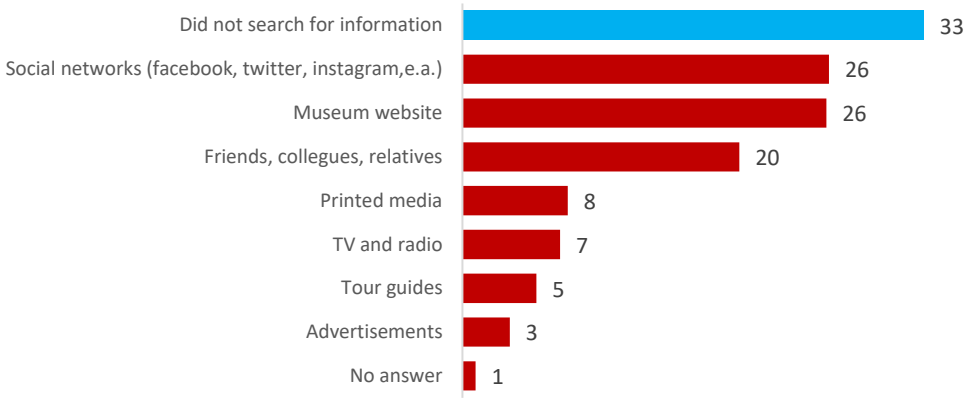
Every third visit spontaneous and unplanned, only every fourth visit is planned a week or longer in advance.

Museum visitors survey: Spontaneous and planned museum visits (%)



Visitors search for information in social networks right before the visit.

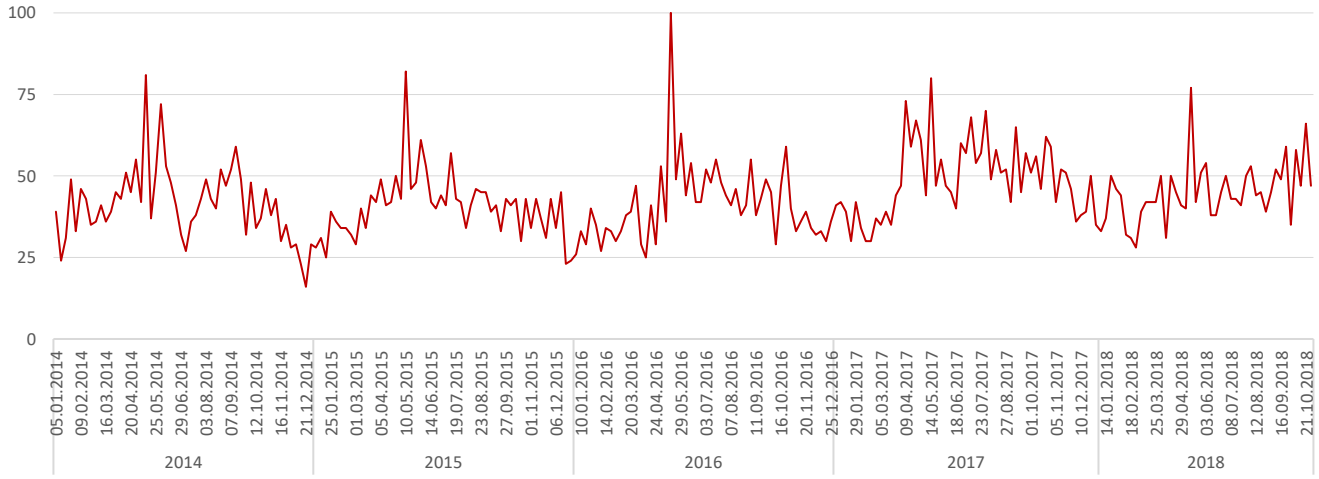
Museum visitors survey: Information sources (%)



There is surge of museum website visits during the Museum Night, there are twice as little use of museum websites during the rest of the year.

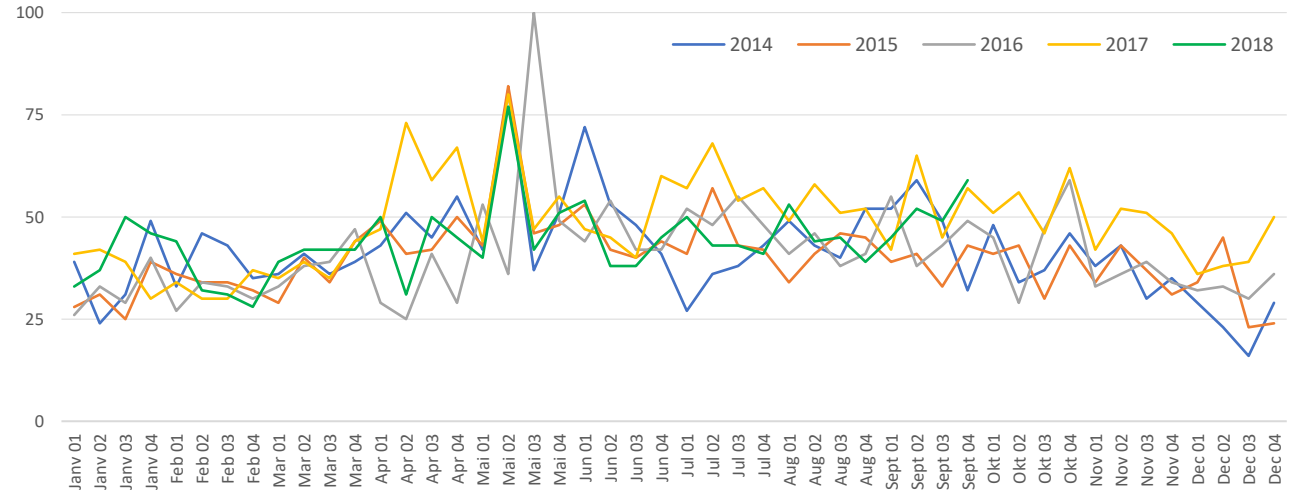
Google Trends data: Search for "muzejs" in internet (relative indicator) 2014 -2018

Note: Numbers indicate an interest about word "muzejs" (museum – in Latvian) in the relation to the peak of the diagram. 100 refers to the highest level of popularity of the unit. 50 indicates of of the highest level of the popularity of the unit.



Google Trends data: Searches for word "muzejs" (museum – in Latvian) in internet (relative indicator) 2014 -2018, tendencies by month

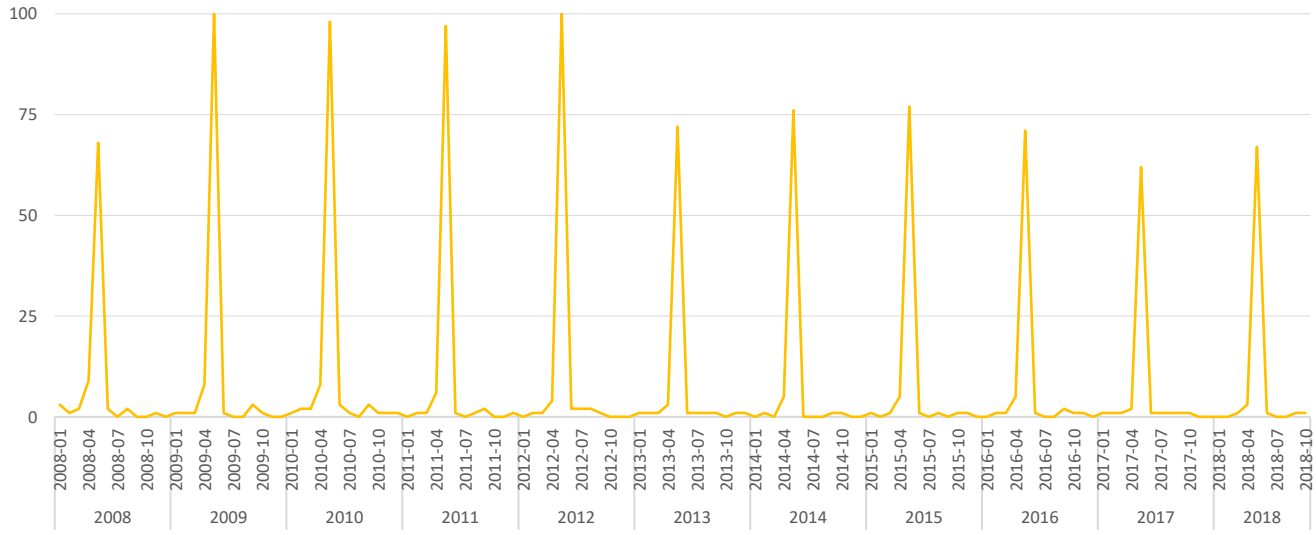
Note: Numbers indicate an interest about word "muzejs" (museum – in Latvian) in the relation to the peak of the diagram. 100 refers to the highest level of popularity of the unit. 50 indicates of of the highest level of the popularity of the unit.



The interest about Museum Night is decreasing

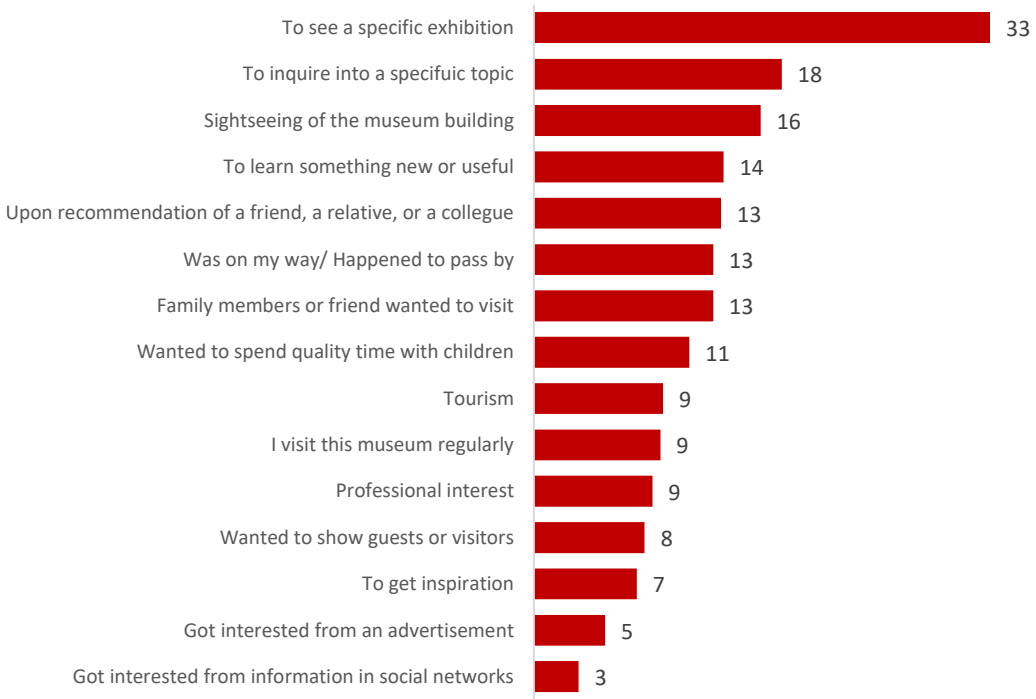
Google Trends data: Search for a phrase "muzeju nakts" (museum night – in Latvian) in internet (relative indicator) 2008 - 2018

Numbers indicate an interest about word "muzejs" (museum – in Latvian) in the relation to the peak of the diagram. 100 refers to the highest level of popularity of the unit. 50 indicates of of the highest level of the popularity of the unit.



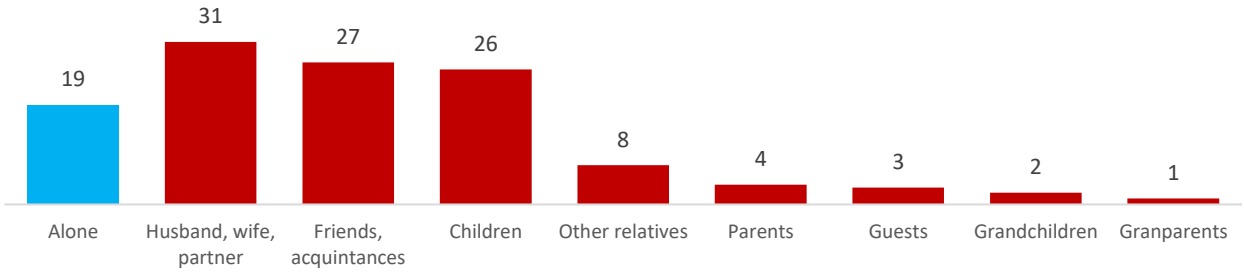
Interest in a specific exhibition is the key motivator to visit a museum

Museum visitors survey: Reasons for visit (%)



People most often visit museum in a company with somebody

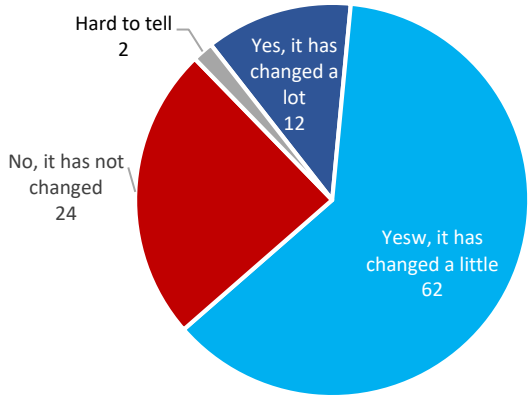
Museum visitors survey: Company with (%)



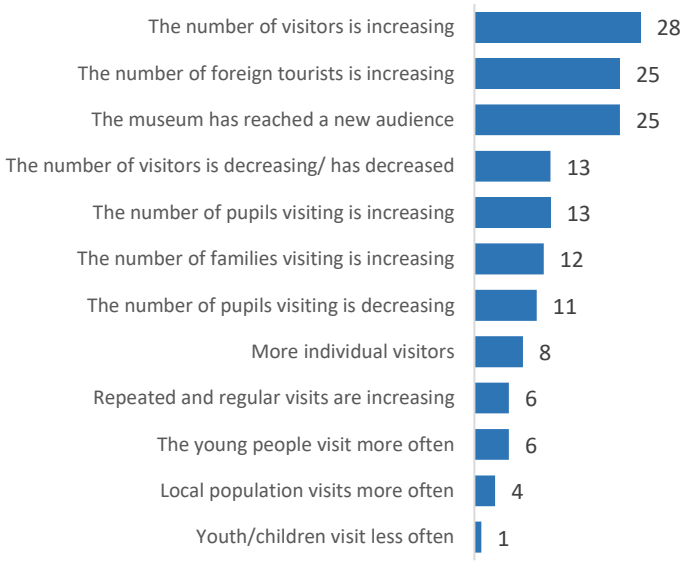
Museum activities towards specific audiences

Most museums have seen significant changes in their audiences

Museum management survey: Evaluation of changes in audience (%)

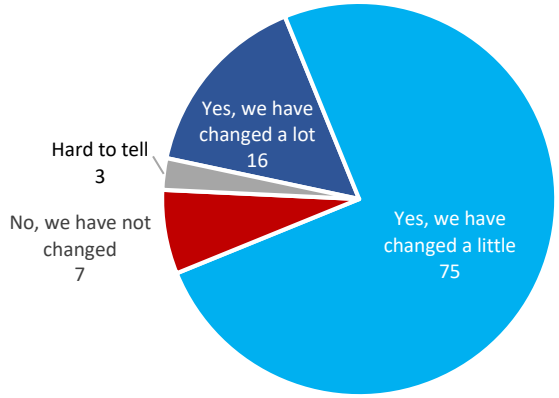


Museum management survey: Changes in the audience (%)

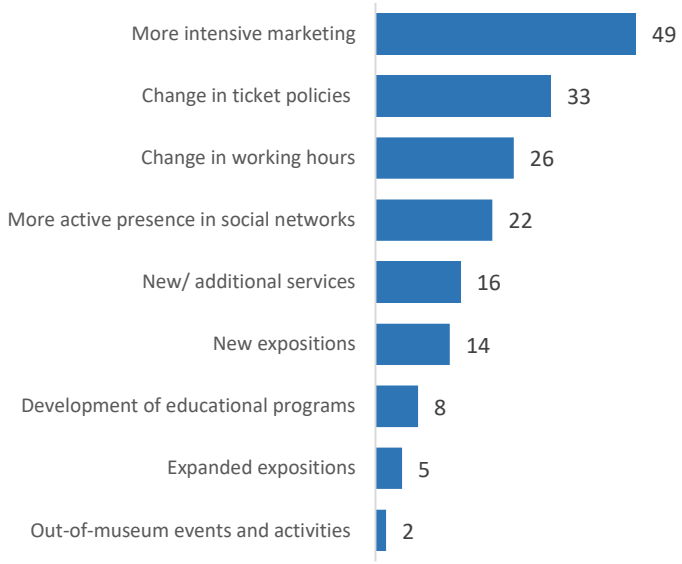


Most museums have invested more in reaching out to potential visitors

Museum management survey: Evaluation of changes in reaching out activities of the museum (%)

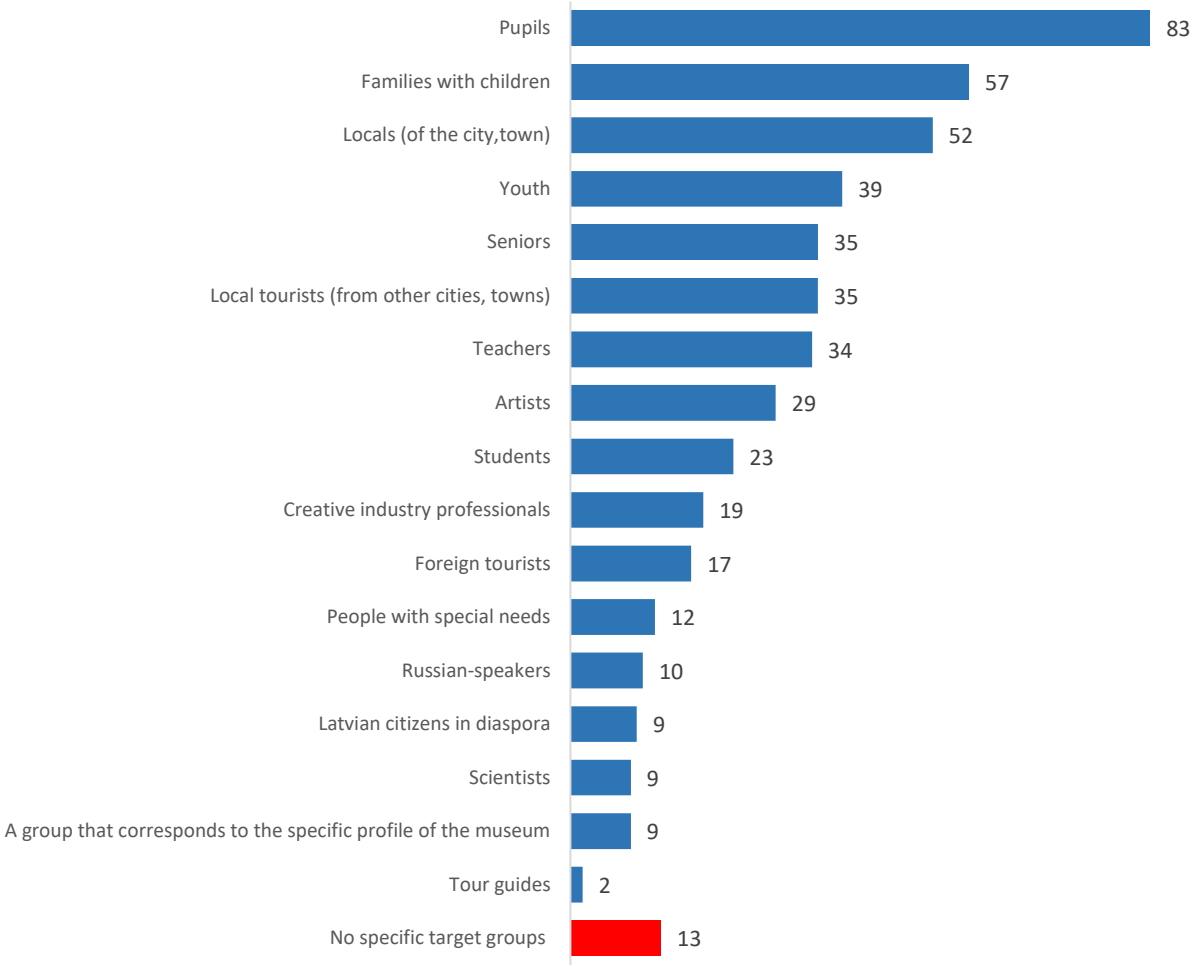


Museum management survey: Changes in reaching out activities (%)



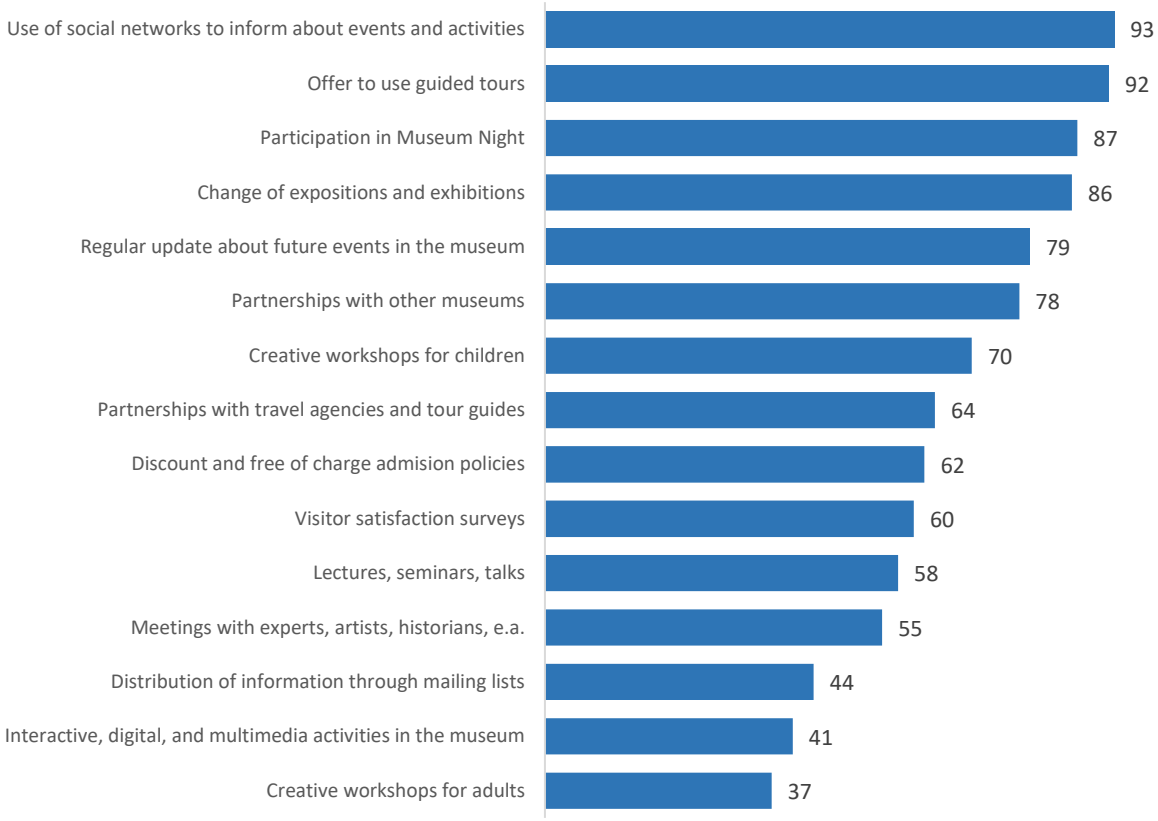
Majority of museums plan special activities for pupils, but there is much less work done with youth, seniors, Russian-speakers, and foreign tourists

Museum management survey: Target audiences addressed through specific activities (%)



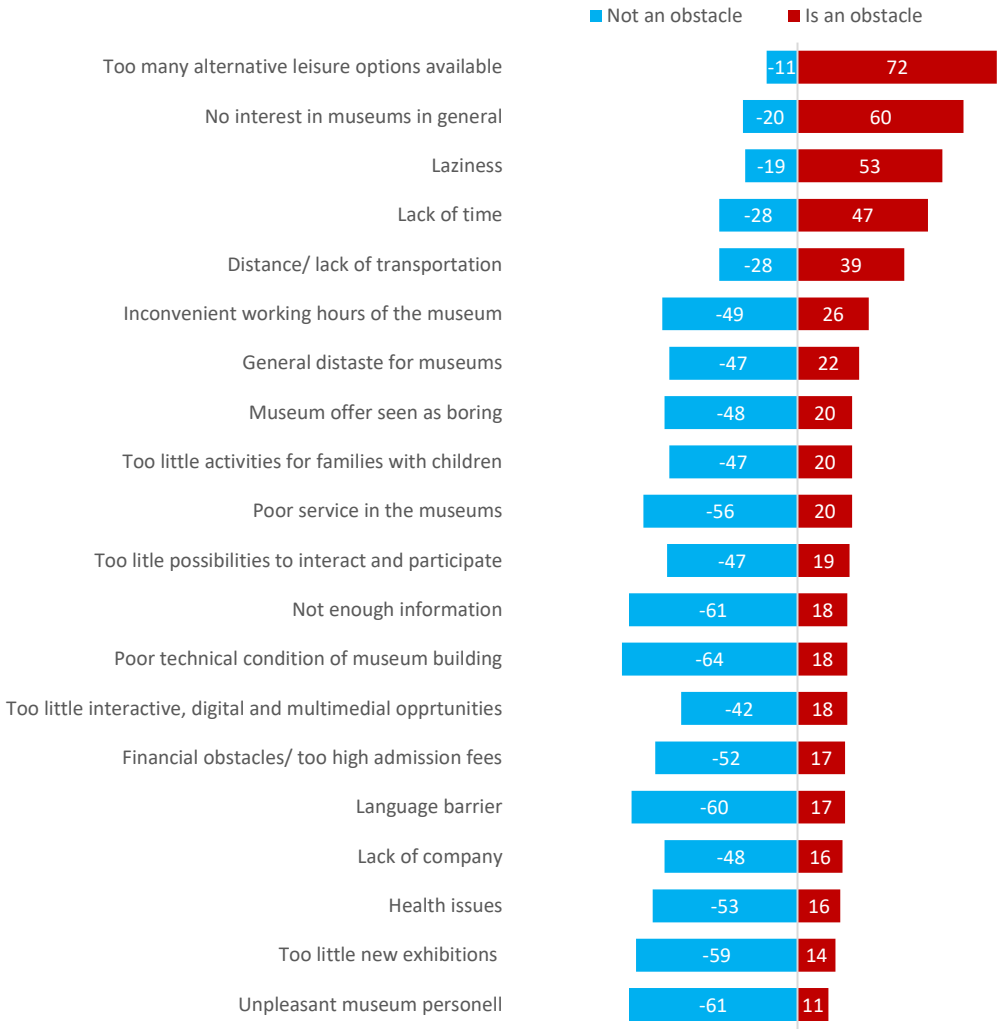
The majority of museums have initiatives for promoting regular visits

Museum management survey: Activities aimed to promote repeated visits (%)



Museums see an extreme diversity in possible leisure options as the main obstacle for audience growth

Museum management survey: Perceived obstacles for audience growth (%)



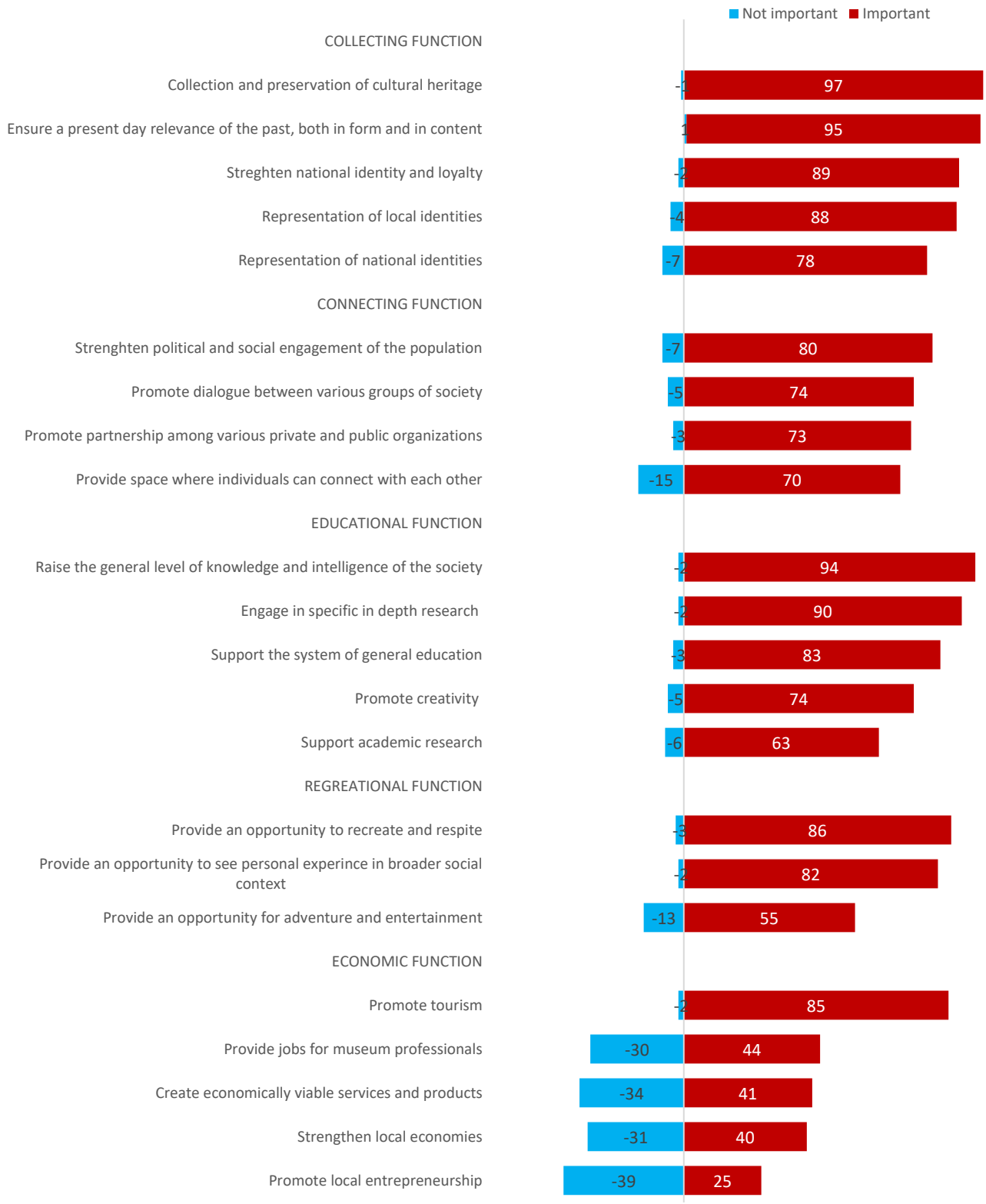
Social roles of museums

The role of museums has changed significantly in the past few decades. Museums have transformed from guardians of well-defined national treasures to dynamic and open platforms for social interaction. The preservation, research and communication functions of museums are now seen as being equally important and interrelated. These changes have an impact on what society expects from museums and consequently on how museums are managed, how they define their strategic priorities, and how they communicate with their audiences and partners. The social impact of museums extends from the narrow field of preservation of cultural heritage to wide range of social influence - socio economic development, territorial and regional development, definition of identities. There are museums that embrace and act upon these new functions and opportunities and there are museums that keep their main focus on the preservation.

Latvian legislation defines that museums should collect, preserve, and popularize cultural heritage and make sure that it is used for purposes of education and social development. It is up to each museum to specify what kind of development it aims to trigger and in what areas it hopes to educate the society. Museum mission analysis, interviews with museum management and a survey of museums carried out as a part of this research project sheds light on how museums perceive themselves, what social roles they aim to play and how they interact with other social players.

The results of the museum management survey suggest that museums see themselves primarily as guardians of cultural heritage, and only then as institutions of education and research. The least important is the role of museums in economic development. Museums see themselves as promoters of social integration, but this self-view does not always correspond with actual everyday practices. The investment of Latvian museums in education and social integration could definitely be greater.

Museum management survey: Roles of museums un society (%)



Main challenges in relation between museums and society

To raise the level of awareness and information

The general survey showed that 38% of the population does not feel well informed about museum activities and offered services. Well administered information is a crucial factor for increasing museum attendance. Therefore, museums should invest more planning and care in information and communication activities to make sure that a museum visit is considered among other free time spending options.

To spark and develop interest to visit a museum

While awareness of what is happening in museums is an important precondition for a museum visit, a general interest in museums is crucial. Survey shows that every fourth person in Latvia is not interested in museums, and this group is hardly accessible. At the same time, about 75% of population is potentially ready to visit a museum more often, and every third of those who have not visited a museum is ready to do it. These data suggest that museum information campaigns cannot be plainly informative but should be attractive and intriguing enough to spark interest. In this respect it is worth to consider a match between the museum offering and the societal expectations. Although the majority of the population feels positive about museums, there are some factors that receive some criticism – 16% see the museum working hours as an obstacle for a museum visit, 19% would prefer museums to be more interactive (providing opportunities to listen, touch, feel, and participate), 20% value tickets as being too expensive.

To build upon interest sparked at the Museum Night

The success of the Museum Night shows that museums have a potential to attract wider audience and make visitors to return for another visit. At the same time, Google data reveals that there is twice as much interest in museums during the Museum Night than throughout the year. If the Museum Night can spark this much interest, it is likely that similar initiatives might attract visitors. It is important also note that the Museum Night has not significantly increased the frequency of the museum visits. The majority of those who visit museums during the Museum Night have not become frequent museums visitors and the frequency of museum visits in general has only slightly increased,

To increase frequency of visits

Data shows that a large proportion of the population has been in a museum, but the frequency of visits is very low – most often people visit a museum one or two times a year, and one of those visits is during the Museum

Night. Even though the overall number of museum visits is increasing, the proportion of the population that has visited museums has gradually decreased over the past four years. This means that the interest in museums is decreasing and the increase in visits is due to a slight increase in frequency and an increase in visits by specific target groups (foreign tourists and visitors of special events). Also, we should take into account that the overall increase in museum visits in the past three years is partly caused by one-time visits to the newly reconstructed museums (e.g. the Latvian National Museum of Art and Riga Motor Museum together make up about 10% of annual museum visits). Thus, one of the challenges that museums face is to spark an interest to return among those visitors that have been to a museum only once or twice over the past year. Taking into account that the population of Latvia is decreasing and will continue to decrease in long-term, the focus on regular visitors should be a priority. The value added of regular visitors is also their social circles (of family, friends, and relatives) that they bring into the museum or that visit museum upon their recommendation.

To broaden the content of museums by strengthening its social role

The survey shows that museums currently are perceived as places to see specific exhibitions or expositions. New exhibitions are the main reason for deciding to visit a museum for the first time or repeatedly. A part of population points out that additional activities in a museum – creative workshops for children or meetings with experts, artists, and historians – would be a reason for their return visit. Consequently, it is clear that society is eager to come to museum for activities other than exhibitions. Although many museums offer guided tours and other activities, the existing offering of museums is attractive only for a part of the population. In this respect it is worth considering the diversity of roles museums might play in a society. Survey of visitors and non-visitors show that museums successfully fulfill the function of collection and its popularization but are not associated with other potential social functions. For example, overall museums currently are not perceived as places to meet others, to debate, co-create, participate, and learn. The demand for additional museum activities points to unused potential to enroll in other social rolls, such as take part in life-long education, meaningful entertainment and recreation, socialization and social integration. This demand is in line with museum development tendencies abroad, where museums work in partnerships with NGOs and make significant contribution to life-long learning, education, social integration, as well as social work, public health, environmental protection, and social rehabilitation.

Broadening of museum audiences

Survey data shows that museums are very successful in attracting the following target groups: women, pupils, age group 15-34, Latvian speakers, those with higher education, those with high level of income (above 600

EUR per month per a family member), families with 3 or more under-age children, and Riga residents. Museums are much less successful in attracting the following target groups: men, age group 65-74, Russian speakers, those with secondary or professional education, unemployed, those with low level of income (299 EUR per month per a family member), single adults without under-age children, rural residents. Also, the survey of museum management shows that the majority of museums have special programs for pupils, families with children and for local population, but very few museums have any special activities and programs for Russian speakers, people with special needs, foreign and local tourists, or youth. This observation is in line with previously discussed need for museums to take on more diverse social roles. It is important to note that although families with children are well represented among museum visitors, only 1/3 of people with children or grandchildren have visited museums. It is possible that the museum offering is seen as inappropriate for children audience.

To evaluate the impact of the Museum Night on the development of the sector

Although the Museum Night activities attract large audiences and is one the most attended cultural events in Latvia, there is many reasons to discuss more thoroughly its role in the general museum scene in Latvia. Population survey shows that the Museum Night does not increase frequency of museum visits – in long-term the number of museum visits has not increased significantly, and in the past four years the proportion of population that has visited museums has actually decreased. Also, data shows that the Museum Night attract only a small proportion of current non-visitors, the majority of those who attend the Museum night has visited a museum 1 or 2 times a year. It is important to stress that it does not mean that they would visit a museum if there was no Museum Night. It would be more precise to argue that the Museum Night stimulates interest about museums and motivates people to visit museums during this special occasion, but it does not have any significant long-term effect on museum visits outside this occasion. Thus, in conclusion from everything said above it would be important to have a discussion among museum professionals on the overall effect of the Museum Night. Such necessity for a discussion is also seen from the survey of museum management – 59% believes that the Museum Night is in need of a reform (14% argue that this initiative should be canceled and should be replaced by alternative events, while others suggest various improvements and changes).