Pandemic, Post-pandemic and Podcasting in Museums: Comparison Study of the Most Visited Museums in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia (A Marketing Communications Perspective)[1]

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Pandemic, Post-pandemic and Podcasting in Museums: Comparison Study of the Most Visited Museums in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia (A Marketing Communications Perspective)
The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic prompted cultural institutions, including museums, to adapt to widespread closures. This study investigates the role of podcasts as a strategic tool for the most visited museums in Poland, Slovakia and Czechia during and after the pandemic. In the theoretical section, the paper discusses the emergence of podcasts, emphasising their marketing potential and role during the pandemic. The empirical part aims to identify the extent and nature of podcast integration by the ten most visited museums from each of the three monitored countries. The results show different approaches to the adaptation of podcasting in the observed space–time. Despite some differences, we also mapped similar trends. A crucial finding was that the end of the pandemic brought a certain modus vivendi of incorporating podcasting into museum activities, which can be framed as a normalisation, completing the lively development that took place during the pandemic.

Keywords: podcasting, museums, marketing communications approach, pandemic, post-pandemic

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1 Introduction

The years 2020 and 2021 were heavily influenced by COVID-19, significantly impacting events worldwide. The global crisis began in late 2019, only to fully erupt in the spring months of 2020 (the so-called first wave) and then recur several times, as in the autumn of 2020, winter of 2020/21, and the summer of 2021. The crisis had a global impact on political, religious, economic, social, and cultural activities. Countries introduced unique sets of legal rules such as sanitary regimes to prevent and fight the spreading of the disease. Facemasks, latex gloves, and social distancing became essential elements of everyday life. Additionally, societies went into lockdown. Schools and universities closed or limited the number of people who could be in a room, shifting instead to online learning. Banks, businesses, restaurants and shopping malls shut and churches and cultural institutions – such galleries, concert halls, cinemas, theatres and museums – were ordered to close their doors. Cultural institutions faced a harsh time, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) in its survey of a sample of 1,600 museums in 107 countries, found that 94.7% of all institutions worldwide were closed in the first year of the pandemic, while in Europe, this figure was as high as 98%. This situation had a massive economic impact on these institutions. ICOM also reported that 12% of museums faced the risk of having to close for good.[2]

Under these circumstances, museums had to find solutions to survive without their most basic activity – face-to-face contact with the visitors.[3] Developing their use of digital media seemed to be an optimal route. Of course, many museums had successfully embraced online communication long before the pandemic.[4] However, the scale of online activities intensified in 2020–2022.[5] For example, King et al. researched museums in the UK, observing that out of 26 closed museums, 12 provided online content, suggesting that some institutions responded immediately and moved online despite the unexpected closures.[6] Similarly, Agostino et al. investigated the 100 most visited Italian museums that increased their social media activity and changed the content by emphasising intensive self-promotion.[7] The study found that when museums were closed entirely, the number of followers on their social network channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) grew. On the other hand, even a more robust use of social media could not provide a complete formula for virtual museum presentations. Websites and social media offered interactivity and a sense of participation created by webinars or online

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[2] *Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19*, accessed January 12, 2024, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Report-Museums-and-COVID-19.pdf

[3] GAWEŁ, Łukasz. Museums without Visitors? Crisis of the Polish Museums during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Their Revival under the Digital Experience Offer. In: *Sustainability*, 2023, 15(15), p. 11844.

[4] LI, Feng, NUCCIARELLI, Alberto, RODEN, Sinead & GRAHAM, Gary. How smart cities transform operations models: a new research agenda for operations management in the digital economy. In: *Production Planning and Control,* 27(6), 2016, pp. 514–528; RAIMO, Nicola, De TURILVANO, Ricciadelli A. & VITOLLA, Filippo. Digitalization in the cultural industry: evidence from Italian museums. In: *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 28(8), 2022, pp. 1962–1974

[5] HABELSBERGER, Beatrix, E. M. & BHANSING, Pawan, V. Art Galleries in Transformation: Is COVID-19 Driving Digitisation? In: *Arts*, 10(3), 2021, p. 48; ŻUBRYK, Klaudia. Cultural Institutions During the First Wave of the Coronavirus Pandemic – A Comparative Analysis of Social Media Activities of Chosen Theatres. In: *Cranium*, 13(1), 2021, pp. 118–133.

[6] KING, Ellie, SMITH, Paul M., WILSON, Paul & WILLIAMS, Mark, A. Digital Responses of UK Museum Exhibitions to the COVID-19 Crisis, March – June 2020. In: *The Museum Journal*, 64(3), 2021, pp. 487–504.

[7] AGOSTINO, Deborah, ARNABOLDI, Michela & LAMPIS, Antonio. Italian state museums during the COVID-19 crisis: From on-site closure to online openness. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(4), 2020, pp. 362–372.

streaming[8]) but at the same time they were aimed at a mass audience and lacked the emotional intimacy that should be a part of exposure to exhibitions.[9] In this situation, the museums had to look for something more humanistic: a platform embodying the paradigm of a virtual appendix to a physically existing object that could replace the physical visit with a virtual performance[10]. Podcasts offered this because they provide close connections between the broadcaster and receiver regardless of space and time.[11]

This paper is divided into theoretical and the empirical parts. In the former, we refer to podcasting and describe its appearance in the museum sector (including during the pandemic). In latter, we identify the extent and nature of podcast integration into the museums' activities, presenting data which helps us scope out the scale of podcasting in the most visited museums in CEE, represented by three countries: Poland, Slovakia and Czechia.

2 Literature Review

Anderson et al. define podcasts as "offering audio or video files over the Internet to subscribing users".[12] Bockarova and Danesi offer a more extensive approach.[13] They state that a podcast is an audio recording comprising informational content and music, accessible for download over the Internet on media players or devices. This emphasises that, unlike traditional radio shows, podcasts offer the convenience of being downloadable at the user's discretion. In the past, podcasts were seen as a continuity or development of radio;[14] more recently they have come to be were understood as new media.[15] Hancock and McMurtry conclude that podcast is a "self-regulating and self-generating media form".[16] Spinelli and Dann see it as a medium with original ways of producing, listening and disseminating.[17]

The importance of podcasts is highlighted because they are becoming a high-profit medium. In 2022, the global podcast market was valued at $20.3 billion, $4.7 billion more than in 2021. According to Research and Markets forecasts, the industry is set to grow by 30% annually until 2026.[18] Researchers identify multiple factors contributing to its success. They highlight

[8] ŚMIŁOWICZ, Katarzyna. Online Marketing Communication of Polish National Museums in Comparison to Selected European Museums. In: *Marketing of Scientific and Research Organizations*, 37(3), 2020, pp. 33–50.

[9] PERRY, Sarra, ROUSSOU, Maria, ECONOMOU, Maria, YOUNG, Hilary &, PAUJOL, Laia. Moving beyond the virtual museum: Engaging visitors emotionally, *23rd International Conference on Virtual System & Multimedia (VSMM)*. Dublin: Ireland, 2017, pp. 1–8.

[10] McLUHAN, Marshall. *Zrozumieć media. Przedłużenie człowieka.* Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowo-Techniczne, 2004.

[11] McCLUNG, Steven & JOHNSON, Kristine. Examining the Motives of Podcast Users. In: *Journal of Radio and Audio Media, 1 (17), 2020, pp.* 82–95.

[12] ANDERSON, Sandra, BATEMAN, Heather, HARRIS Emma & McADAM, Katy. *Dictionary of Media Studies*. London: A & C Black Publishers, 2006, p. 177.

[13] BOCKAROVA, Mariana & DANESI, Marcel. *Semiotic Analysis for Advertisers & Marketers*. Legas, 2013.

[14] LACEY, Kate. Smart radio and audio apps: the politics and paradoxes of listening to (anti)-social media. In: *Australian Journalism Review*, 36(2), 2014, pp. 77–90.

[15] LINAERS, Fox, D. & BERRY, Richard. *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*. New York: Springer, 2018.

[16] HANCOCK, Danielle & McMURTRY, Leslie. 'I Know What a Podcast Is': Post-Serial Fiction and Podcast Media Identity. In: LLINAERS, Dario, FOX, Neil & BERRY, Richard (eds.). *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 81–105.

[17] SPINELLI, Martin & DANN Lance. *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

[18] *Worldwide Podcast Industry Analysis: Outlook Through 2023*, accessed february 12th, 2024, https://www.reportlinker.com/p06318530/Podcasting-Global-Market-Report.html?utm_source=GNW

it as another shift towards personalisation in the media, akin to on-demand television.[19] This process stems from personal digital devices, services and applications, resulting in a fusion of culture and technology. Consequently, podcasts offer fresh avenues for monetisation through crowdfunding and subscription models.[20] Both approaches rely on user loyalty, but in the case of crowdfunding, it is an effective model of engagement due to the way it positions the audience as patrons, offering them additional benefits such as access to exclusive materials, membership of a community, or the opportunity to promote themselves. For this reason, crowdfunding now plays a significant role in supporting cultural, artistic and media projects.

Pérez-Alaejos et al. mention the importance of fees in podcasting, where the audience, in exchange for a small amount of money, gains exclusive content, such as access to live materials or recordings.[21] The recommendation model also plays a significant role. Podcasting platforms employ a type of content categorisation that enables the creation of unique user profiles and leads to a more prolonged engagement with the content, thereby strengthening their advertising potential. As Bezbaruah and Brahmbhatt state, podcast advertising is attractive due to its cost-effectiveness and strong alignment with the content – better than in television or radio.[22]

Due to their increasing popularity, podcasts have become a component of multiplatformisation strategies. This approach refers to distributing content across various platforms to reach a broader audience and provide users with consistent experiences regardless of their chosen medium.[23] It extends podcasts' reach beyond the core product by sharing content, for example, on social media.[24] Consequently, many companies within and outside the media industry develop their podcasts as platforms to reach more users effectively. Thus, podcasts, as well as cultural institutions like museums, are becoming vital in modern marketing schemes[25]).

In 2009, Weber observed that although podcasts "are top-rated among young people, [they] are rarely used by … museums".[26] However, by 2012, Kang and Gretzel were finding evidence

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[19] NEIRA, Antonio. *Streaming Wars. La nueva televisión.*Barcelona: Ed. Planeta, Libros Cúpula, 2020; GARCIA-MARTIN, David. Mapping the factors that determine engagement in podcasting: design from the users and podcasters'experience. In: *Communication & Society,* 33(2), 2020, pp. 49–63.

[20] DOLIWA, Urszula, SZYDŁOWSKA, Magdalena, SZCZEPAŃSKA, Paulina, STACHOWICZ, Ada & KAŹMIERCZAK, Piotr. Crowdfunding as a method of financing podcasting – the analysis of the motivations of supporters of „Raport o stanie świata". In: *Media - Biznes - Kultura. Dziennikarstwo i komunikacja społeczna*, 12, 2022, pp. 131–147.

[21] PÉREZ-ALAEJOS, María-de-la-Peña-Mónic, TEROL-BOLINCHES, Raúl & BARRIOS-RUBIO, Andrés. Podcast production and marketing strategies on the main platforms in Europe, North America, and Latin America. Situation and perspectives. In: *Digital audio communication*, 31(5), 2022, p. 234.

[22] BEZBARUAH, Subhalakshmi & BRAHMNHATT, Kuldeep. Are Podcast Advertisements Effective? An Emerging Economy Perspective. In: *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 2022, pp.215–233.

[23] DOYLE, Gillian. *Understanding Media Economics*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013.

[24] JÄRVENTIE-THESLEFF, Rita, MOISANDER, Johanna & VILLI, Mikko. The Strategic Challenge of Continuous Change in Multi-Platform Media Organizations—A Strategy-as-Practice Perspective. In: *International Journal on Media Management*, 16(3–4), 2014, pp. 123–138.

[25] SPINELLI, Martin & DANN Lance. Podcasting…; LÖGDBERG, Arvid & WAHLQVIST, Oscar. *Podcasting as a Digital Content Marketing Tool within B2B: A qualitative case study exploring why and how Swedish B2B companies use podcasts as a marketing tool.* Sweden, Linköping University, Department of Management and Engineering, 2020, LIU-IEI-FIL-A--20/03367--SE. Master Thesis in Business Administration,

[26] WEBER, Cornelia. Web Communication: A Content Analysis of German University Collections and Museums Websites. *Open-Access-Publikationsserver der Humboldt-Universität*, 2009, p. 34.

that podcasts were becoming an essential part of the communication mix in the arts.[27] When investigating visitors' opinions, researchers found that most people felt that podcasts could enhance the museum experience (70.3%), help them to retain more information from the visit (69.8%) and would encourage them to visit museums more often (30%).

The potential advantages of podcasting include their relatively low cost; ease of production, distribution and promotion; accessibility and flexibility; usefulness for audio tours, lectures and other forms of dissemination; and their capacity to raise "awareness of a museum beyond its geographical location".[28] To this list, Felix and Fleming add personalisation of the museum experience,[29] while Yeh et al. emphasise that podcasts can promote and build relations with visitors,[30] observing that museums can use sound to connect with audiences, outline storylines, establish emotional bonds, set the contextual ambience for an immersive encounter and construct engagement pathways. Interestingly, even in earlier studies, the phenomenon's effectiveness was confirmed.[31]

In the context of museology, new technologies play a significant role, as a tool both for the presentation of artefacts and for promotion. Following advances in communication technologies, museums are integrating social media, augmented and virtual reality, mobile apps and other interactive equipment into the design of visitors' experience, a move "which has been of emerging interest to researchers and museum professionals."[32] When appropriately designed, used and tested, websites and mobile applications foster interest in museums, increasing the number of visitors and creating unique experiences.[33]

New technologies have also changed the way museums promote themselves to audiences: besides the traditional advertising and public relations, institutions are exploring new modes of communication and interaction with the public, such as social media, blogs, videos, podcasts and apps, among others.[34] The integration of social media into museum communication is also highlighted in various research studies. According to four researchers from Romania, there is a correlation between the use of social media in museums and museum attendance. Use of social media by museums to communicate with actual and potential visitors correlates directly and positively on the number of visitors. By processing the data collected from the websites of the selected museums, Coman et al. found that when the number of followers increased on

[27] GRETZEL, Urlike & KANG, Myunghwa. Perceptions of museum podcast tours: Effects of consumer innovativeness, Internet familiarity and podcasting affinity on performance expectancies. In: *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4, 2012, pp. 155–163.

[28] LEON, Sharon, BRENNAN, Sheila, LESTER, Dave & ODIORNE, Andrea. Mobile for Museums (White Paper and Mobile Development Supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation). In: *Center for History and New Media*, 2024, p. 2.

[29] FELIX, Dia & FLEMING, Erin. Real Talk: The Power (and Limits) of Audio Storytelling in Museums, In: *Journal of Museum Education*, 48(1), 2023, pp. 21–28.

[30] YEH, Yu-Chun, LEUNG Cheuk-Yiu, CHEN, Ying & TING, Wei-Hsin. Museum of Listening: How Podcasts Build Relationships with Listeners. In: *Museum of Science and Technology*, 25(4), 2021, pp. 47–73.

[31] GRETZEL, Urlike & KANG, Myunghwa. Perceptions… p. 4.

[32] LOUREIRO, Sandra, GUERREIRO, Joao, & ALI, Faizan. 20 Years of research on virtual reality and augmented reality in tourism context: A text-mining approach. In: *Tourism Management*, 77, 2020, pp. 16–32

[33] KABASSI, Katerina. Evaluating websites of museums: State of the art. In: Journal of Cultural Heritage, 24, 2017, pp. 184–196

[34] GONSALES, Flavia. Social marketing for museums: an introduction to social marketing for the arts and culture sector. In: *RAUSP Management Journal*, 56, pp. 314 - 333

three platforms – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – the number of visitors also increased.[35] According to the aforementioned ICOM report, based on data collected between April and May 2021, 92.7% of respondents reported that their museum has a social media account, and 45.7% reported increased usage as a result of their social media use.[36] Across all NEMO studies, social media was the most popular form of "online service", outweighing other digital initiatives in museums.[37]

However, among the various forms of digital enhancement provided by technology, podcasting, in particular, has emerged as a vital medium, enabling museums to extend their reach and engage audiences in innovative ways. As Black discusses, the integration of digital tools, including podcasts, allows museums to create immersive and interactive experiences that captivate visitors.[38] Parry highlights that digital media, such as podcasts, are essential for expanding a museum's presence beyond its physical boundaries, fostering global engagement.[39] Furthermore, Proctor emphasises that podcasts, along with other digital technologies, not only enrich the visitor experience but also provide valuable insights into audience preferences, enabling museums to tailor their offerings more effectively.[40]

It could be assumed that podcasting became more popular among museums during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the literature devoted to this topic is scarce. Until now, researchers have mainly focused on general changes in online communication of cultural institutions. For example, Samaroudi et al. showed that most UK and US museums and galleries use digital tools to present collections and exhibitions,[41] and Snels investigated the effects of the online transition in three Chinese museums.[42] Kidd et al. and Heras-Pedrosa et al. took a narrower approach, concentrating on how institutions' social media approaches changed during the pandemic.[43],[44] Silva examined digital projects created by museums in the UK, the USA and Australia to connect with the younger generation.[45] King et al. concluded that in the UK, "of

[35] COMAN, Adela, GRIGORE, Ana-Maria, ARDELEAN, Andrea & MARACINE, Robert. The World of Museums and Web 2.0: Links Between Social Media and the Number of Visitors in Museums. In: *Social Computing and Social Media*. 12194, 2020, pp. 442–458.

[36] Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19: third survey, accessed 2022, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Museums-and-Covid-19_third-ICOM-report.pdf

[37] Digital Learning and Education in Museums innovative approaches and Insights, accessed January 2023, https://www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/Publications/NEMO_Working_Group_LEM_Report_Digital_Learning_and_Education_in_Museums_12.2022.pdf

[38] BLACK, Graham. *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge, 2012.

[39] PARRY, Ross. *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*. London: Routledge, 2007.

[40] PROCTOR, Nancy. *The Mobile Museum: Guidelines and Best Practices on Creating Mobile Experiences*. Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2015.

[41] SAMOURDI, Myrsini, ECHAVARRIA, Karina & PERRY, Lara. Heritage in lockdown: Digital provision of memory institutions in the UK and US of America during the COVID-19 pandemic. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(4), 2020, pp. 337–361.

[42] SNELS, Jori. Virtual Connectedness in Times of Crisis: Chinese Online Art Exhibitions During the COVID-19 Pandemic. In: *World Art*, 12(1), 2022, pp. 95–118.

[43] KIDD, Jenny, McAVOY, Eva, N. & OSTROWSKA, Anna. Negotiating hybridity, inequality, and hyper-visibility: museums and galleries' social media response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Cultural Trends*, 31(5), 2022, pp. 19–36.

[44] HERAS-PEDROSA, Carolos, IGLESIAS SÁNCHEZ, Patricia, P., CAMBRINO-MALDONADO, Carmen, LOPEZ-DELGRADO, Pilar & GALARZA-FERNANDEZ, Emelina. Museum communication management in the digital ecosystem: Impact of COVID-19 on digital strategy. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 37(5), 2022 pp. 548–570.

[45] SILVA, Caroline. Pockets of Resilience – the Digital Responses of Youth Collectives in Contemporary Art Museums During Lockdown. In: *Journal of Museum Education*, 46(4), 2021, pp. 493–508.

the eighteen museums hosting content on their websites ... four utilised audio content, such as a podcast".[46]

In most of the abovementioned papers, researchers refer to museums podcasting in the context of developing new content, delivering the next platform from which to "talk about art and connect with the community even more"[47] or creating "an alternative way to ensure that the community stayed engaged with the museum"[48]. Latham and Jaede even suggested that integrating podcasts with a "cinematic experience, using poetry and sound could help to inspire creativity and spread positivity during the challenging times of the pandemic."[49] On the other hand, some authors, like Kelley, suggested that after the museums reopened, digitalisation processes (including podcasts) would continue.[50]

Based on the literature review, we conclude that while state-of-the-art podcasting is abundant, coverage of podcasting in museums during the pandemic remains limited. The researchers who have touched on this subject demonstrate the positive sides of using this technology in cultural institutions, highlighting its growing popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. They mainly underline the importance of establishing close relationships with audiences, the low costs of producing and hosting podcasts, and their promotional potential (primarily in increasing the reach of the institution's cultural program).

3 Materials and Methods

Our study is unique as it addresses the specific question of museums' use of podcasting during the pandemic, studying three CEE countries that have not yet been included in similar research. Considering the literature gap and selected topic, we attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1) What was the scale of the museums' podcasting during the pandemic?
RQ2) Has COVID-19 impacted museum podcasting, and if so, how?

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, we set no hypotheses. We decided not to focus on the entire breadth of the investigated phenomenon, because there are hundreds of museums in the analysed countries, varying in theme, specialisation, ownership, size, concept, and the number of visitors. In terms of visitor numbers, most museums in these countries are either small, less impactful or regional/locally oriented. Thus, when selecting research targets, we decided to focus on museums with the most visitors. Although this focus reduces the validity of quantitative data, it allowed us to understand more clearly how podcasting was being used in an important segment of the museum sector in the studied countries.

Our secondary results covered the main frameworks for using podcasting and reduced the impact of secondary factors – for example, where there was already intense interest in podcasts

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[46] KING, Ellie, SMITH, Paul M., WILSON, Paul & WILLIAMS, Mark. A. Digital Responses of UK Museum Exhibitions to the COVID-19 Crisis, March – June 2020. In: *The Museum Journal,* 64(3), 2021, pp. 487–504.

[47] KELLEY, Erika. How Museums Have Adapted to Life during COVID-19. In: *History in the Making, 14(*16), 2021, p. 288.

[48] Ibidem.

[49] LATHAM, Kiersten, F. & JAEDE Katherine, F. Take that COVID! Positive Documents Emerging from the Museum Sector. In: *Proceedings from the Document Academy*, 8(2), 2021, p. 18.

[50] KELLEY, Erika. How Museums…

in certain regional institutions that could have skewed the results. It is important to underline that we purposely did not adopt a qualitative approach in our research. The main reason for this was that in our exploratory study we wanted to investigate the scale of marketing communication in museums' podcasting, not the content of podcasts. However, the latter investigation constitutes a plan for future research.

3.1 Selecting the countries

The authors focused on three countries within the CEE area: Poland, Slovakia and Czechia. These countries provide data that enables a comprehensive view of the issue. Comparing the three cultural markets, we found they had much in common but that there were also some characteristics that divided them.

All three countries went through a long period of socialism, which was replaced by a democratic system at the end of the 1980s. Today, they are fully part of European and transatlantic structures. Due to their geographical and cultural proximity, they are, along with Hungary, members of the so-called Visegrad Group. At the same time, they remain distinct from one another. With a population of nearly 37 million, Poland is by far the largest country. The second is Czechia, with a population of almost 10 million; the smallest is Slovakia, with approximately 5.5 million people[51]. The population size corresponds to the number of museums in each country. Poland has 936 museums, visited by 36.7 million people in 2022[52]; there are 479 museums in the Czech Republic visited by 1.46 million people in 2021[53]; and Slovakia has 112 museums, visited by 2.79 million people in 2021[54].

With regard to the pandemic, it is worth noting that all countries implemented severe sanitary restrictions which has a strong impact on cultural institutions.

3.2 Research process: methods and tools

A qualitative content analysis method was used.[55] First, we identified the ten most visited museums in the three countries using available museum attendance statistics. The foundation of the corpus material was the websites of the ten most visited museums in each of our countries. In the second stage, we narrowed the selection by identifying how many of the most popular 30 museums implemented podcasting. To do that, we studied museums' websites and verified every podcast activity. We focused on the podcasts accessible from 2019 to check their development during and after the pandemic.

After identifying the final sample, we prepared the criteria for the analysis in line with Mayring's approach based on theoretical differentiation of the sub-components of the problem.[56] We adopted a marketing communication approach to the problem, addressing:

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[51] EUROSTAT. *Population change – Demographic balance and crude rates at national level*, accessed November 27th, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TOUR_DEM_TNW__custom_4174895/default/table?lang=en

[52] CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE. *Museum activities in 2022*, Warsaw, 2023.

[53] *EGMUS – European Group on Museums Statistics,* accessed 27 November 2023, https://www.egmus.eu/nc/es/statistics/5_most_visited_museums/show_most_visited/country/czech-republic/

[54] SNM. Výročné správy múzeí SR [Annual Reports of Museums of the Slovak Republic]. Accessed: 23.11.2022. https://www.snm.sk/odborne-pracoviska/muzeologicky-kabinet/vyrocne-spravy-muzei-sr

[55] MAYRING, Philipp. *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*, accessed, 27 November 2023, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173

[56] Ibidem.

Distribution, in terms of the frequency and mean of dissemination across platforms;

price, in terms of the fee for accessing the podcasts;

promotion, in terms of support the podcast received from other platforms belonging to the museums (websites, apps and social media).

As a final step, we created a coding key (using Excel). It included the museum's name, podcast title, year of broadcasting, content description, distribution, fees and promotion. In the last step, we coded the corpus.

4 Results

For the final sample, we identified six museums for Poland, two for Czechia and three for Slovakia. All the museums used podcasting in 2019–2022.

The Polish museums were: Muzeum Łazienki Królewskie w Warszawie (Royal Łazienki Museum); Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie (Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów); Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum (The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum); Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz–Birkenau w Oświęcimiu (Memorial and Museum Auschwitz–Birkenau); Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (National Museum in Warsaw); and Muzeum Zamkowe w Malborku (Malbork Castle Museum).

For Slovakia, following museums were selected: Slovenské národné múzeum–Spišské múzeum v Levoči (SNM–Spišské museum); Ľubovnianske múzeum – hrad v Starej Ľubovni (Castle and Open-Air Museum) and Slovenské národné múzeum–Historické múzeum v Bratislave (Slovak National Museum). For Czechia, we identified the following museums producing podcasts: Národní muzeum, Praha (National Museum, Prague) and Národní zemědělské muzeum (National Agricultural Museum), both located in the capital city.

4.1 Volume of podcasting

As the most useful and informative indicator of podcast processing in the study area, we decided to process the results in terms of the total quantity, that is, the total number of podcast episodes produced. To present the podcasting implementation process, we enriched the data by adding figures from 2019 (Fig. 1).
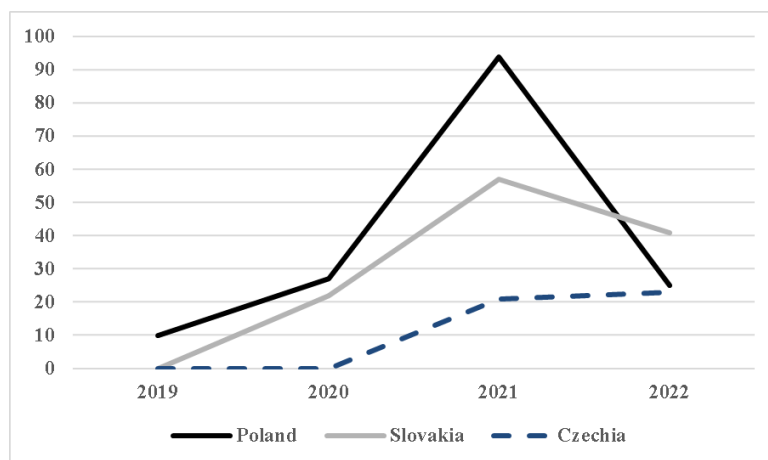

Fig. 1: *Number of podcast episodes in the most visited museums for each country (2019–2022).*

As can be seen, only Polish museums had started podcasting activities before the pandemic. However, they released most episodes during 2021 – a year with the most restrictions related to limited visitors. In 2022, museums continued podcasting activities, albeit with significantly fewer activities compared to the first lockdown periods.

Czech museums were quite passive about the production of podcasts in the first two years of monitoring and only started producing them during the most critical period in 2021. Although Czech museums produced the smallest number of podcast episodes in the study period, it is the only country where we saw an increase in the last year measured.

In the case of Slovakia, the Slovak National Museum – Historical Museum in Bratislava initiated podcasting in the pandemic year of 2020. The other two institutions started to produce podcasts only during 2021. In 2022, only one museum (Slovak National Museum – Historical Museum in Bratislava) was still issuing podcasts. Similarly to Poland, between 2021 and 2022 the total number of episodes declined, albeit at a slower rate than in Poland.
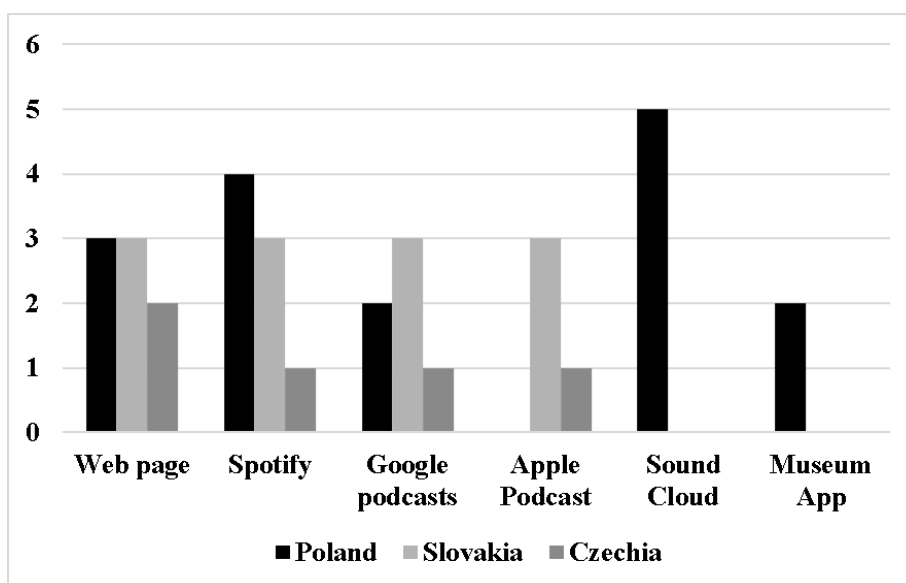
4.2 Distribution

Fig. 2: *Distribution of podcasts produced by the most visited museums for each country (2019–2022).*

We followed the paths of the museum podcasts' exposure, simultaneously relating this factor with distribution and promotion. We checked museums' websites and other platforms, such as applications or podcast aggregators. Interestingly, although all these platforms spread the content, both internal (website, application) and external (aggregators, social media) ones remained primarily vehicles for promotion, in that all of them exposed museums' branding.

The Polish museums distributed their podcasts predominantly through popular streaming platforms, with SoundCloud and Spotify emerging as the leading choices. Only three institutions chose to upload their recordings onto more than two on-demand platforms, and the same number provided an option to stream the content from their websites directly. Interestingly, although Google Podcasts existed at that time (it has since been discontinued), this platform its platform was used only twice. Moreover, only two museums made their podcasts available

through their own apps. All investigated Polish museum podcasts were free of charge, and none of them included sponsorship or advertising.

Regarding distribution, the Czech sample used three on-demand platforms: Spotify, Google Podcasts and Apple Podcasts, but not SoundCloud. Streaming the content directly from the institution's websites was possible as well. However, the museums did not run their own apps at that time. Also, in Czechia, podcast service was free of charge and did not include sponsorship or advertising.

The Slovak museums disseminated their podcasts through all popular streaming platforms (Apple, Spotify, Google) except SoundCloud. Both institutions surveyed provided the ability to stream content directly from their websites, and neither created a museum app. All three podcasts from the two museums were free of charge.
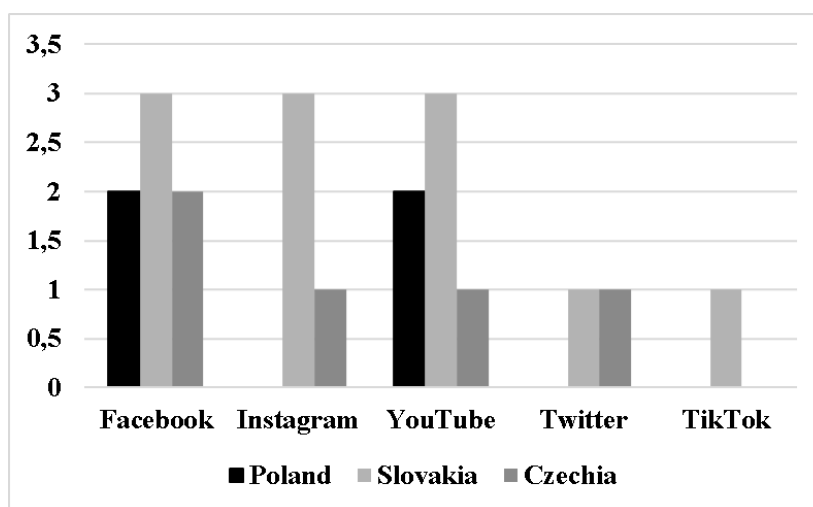
4.3 Social media

Fig. 3: *Promotion of podcasts produced by the most visited museums for each country (2019–2022).*
Source: *own work.*

We also focused on how museums used social media to promote podcasting (i.e. posts, events or links published on their profiles). In Poland, podcast promotion via social media was relatively basic. Institutions reached for Facebook and YouTube most frequently. Other platforms (such as Instagram, Twitter and TikTok) were not used. Czech museums promoted podcasts via Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter (not TikTok, however,). Slovak museums promoted podcasts on all the abovementioned social media platforms. The Slovak National Museum – Spiš Museum in Levoča used TikTok, the only occurrence of this platform among all museums under investigation.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

At the beginning of this interpretation section, we emphasised that the obtained results are somewhat generalised. We did not attempt to fully cover the analysed area but rather to focus on dominant trends in the use of podcasting in the most important (i.e., most visited)

museums of the three analysed countries. At the same time, however, we assumed that the use of podcasting would be more intensive than was in fact the case, especially taking into account the assumed specialisation and professionalisation[57] of the most visited museums in the three countries. Our approach allowed us to realise a comparative perspective, although due to the unexpectedly small sample we approached the interpretation of the data with a commensurate level of scientific scepticism.

Considering the number of museums producing podcasting, Poland emerged as the most active country. Slovakia and Czechia appeared significantly more passive in this respect.

We observed significant differences between the countries from the point of view of the total volume of podcasts produced by the most visited museums (fig. 1). The Czech Republic appeared to be the most passive country in this respect, by a large margin compared to Poland and Slovakia. In terms of trends, however, the results were similar across countries: starting from zero or very low in 2019, through the "discovery" of podcasting in the first lockdown period in 2020, through to its full manifestation in 2021, when the number of episodes peaked. In all cases, however, interest in producing podcasts cooled in 2022. This trend was much more pronounced in Poland than in Slovakia. Although the trends were fairly uniform, the results show slight variations: for example, Poland started producing podcasts in 2019, i.e., at point zero in our research; Czechia's institutions remained inactive in 2020, when the other two countries had already registered the need for podcasting; and finally, interest in podcasting did not cool in the Czechian museums in 2022 in the same way we observed in the other two countries.

A comparative look at 2022 suggests that all three countries were starting to converge in terms of podcast production. The similarities between countries were much more pronounced this year than in the previous years. Overall, the results indicate that podcasts mainly served as a means for museums to reach the public during times of limited or completely suspended mobility. Nevertheless, even after the pandemic, they remained present in the communication space. The difference between the first and the last year of measurement is quite significant in this respect.

We also focused on the distribution platforms used by the most visited museums (Fig. 2). Despite the gradual standardisation of media multiplatformisation,[58] the results were quite variable. What brings us to standardisation is the balanced use of web pages, Google podcasts and, to some extent, Spotify (which had a symmetrical representation in each country). Although it was used most in Poland, Sound Cloud was not used by any of the analysed museums in Slovakia or Czechia. The opposite was true of Apple Podcast – while this platform was used in Slovakia and Czechia, it was not used in the Poland museums.

The results suggest that most museums wanted to place their podcasts on multiple platforms simultaneously, but in practice most did not embrace the full potential of multiplatformisation. They adapted to their expectations of their audiences, as previously indicated by Silverblatt,[59]

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[57] MUSEUMNEXT. "Listen Up: How Podcasts Can Create Regular Museum Goers." In: MuseumNext, 2022. Available at: https://www.museumnext.com/article/listen-up-how-podcasts-can-create-regular-museum-goers/.

[58] JÄRVENTIE-THESLEFF, Rita, MOISANDER, Johanna & VILLI, Mikko. The Strategic Challenge of Continuous Change in Multi-Platform Media Organizations—A Strategy-as-Practice Perspective. In: *International Journal on Media Management*, 16(3–4), 2014, pp. 123–138.

[59] SILVERBLAT, Aar. *Media Literacy*. USA: Praeger, 2014.

Lindeberg,[60] Gretzel[61] and Petranová-Vrabec[62]. For example, in Poland, only two museums used a single platform to stream their podcasts. On the other hand, as many as four Polish museums used three of the five platforms surveyed. We identified an even stronger emphasis on mutliplatformisation in Slovakia and Czechia, where all the museums used five platforms. A wholly ignored platform in the case of Czechia and Slovakia was the use of the museum's own app (used in Poland by two institutions). This fact may have been related to the relatively high financial costs involved in creating such an application but also to the question of its usefulness, given the availability of many standard and well-known distribution platform.

Despite the variability of using platformisation, we find the results in this area rather surprising, as from a marketing communication point of view, there is a clear recommendation to use the maximum number of available platforms, especially the most widely known ones. This approach ensures maximum possible content distribution with minimal expenditure. It is possible that this oversight was related to the insufficient training of communication management staff in the analysed cultural institutions. It may also be related to a certain degree of time pressure on staff due to the critical situation arising from the pandemic.

We conclude that use of social media to promote museums' podcasts varied between institutions and countries (Figure 3), especially for the most popular platforms. However, only the museums in Slovakia made full use of mainstream social media. Due to their popularity, these platforms are particularly suitable tools for informing[63] or reaching audiences[64]. Promoting podcasting was one way to retain the attention of the public, including via connecting to other platforms. As direct contact with the public was very limited due to the pandemic, podcasting became a way to keep in touch with people. Looking at Figure 3, it is clear that social media engagement was significantly different across the studied museums. Facebook and YouTube were used in all three countries, but use of other platforms differed from country to country. In the case of Poland, the use of Twitter and TikTok was surprisingly absent – or else the museums did not consider using these platforms to inform people about their podcast activities. In the case of Poland, but partly also in Czechia, it was surprising to see no or only minimal emphasis on Instagram, a platform particularly suitable for reaching a younger demographic.[65] This raises further questions about why the museums did not take the opportunity to reach the younger audiences which are primarily associated with services like Instagram and TikTok.

In response to RQ1 (what was the scale of the museums' podcasting during the pandemic?) we note that the use of podcasting by the most visited museums varied considerably over time, both from country to country and from a comparative perspective. Overall, the lowest use of

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[60] LINDENBERG, Aura. *So You Have a Podcast? What Broadcasters and Newspapers Are Doing with New Forms of Audio*. Oxford: The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019.

[61] GRETZEL, Urlike & KANG, Myunghwa. Perceptions…

[62] PETRANOVÁ, Dana & VRABEC, Norbert. *Persuázia a médiá*. Trnava: UCM, 2013.

[63] DATAREPORTAL. *Global Social Media Statistics*, accessed November 27th, 2023, https://datareportal.com/social-media-users

[64] PEC - Pew Research Center. *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023. Report*, accessed January 31st, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/

[65] KUČEROVÁ, Lucia. Effective Political Communication with Generation Z through Social Media. In: SOLÍK, Martin, GRACA, Martin, PROSTINÁKOVÁ HOSSOVÁ, Monika. (ed.) Metaverse is the New Universe. Trnava: UCM, 2022, pp. 203–214. https://fmk.sk/download/metaverse-is-the-new-universe.pdf; DIMOCK, Michael. *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins*, accessed October 25th, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

podcasting was observed in the first year of measurement, before the pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 was a tipping point, and the use of podcasts grew massively.

With regard to RQ2 (has COVID-19 impacted museum podcasting, and if so, how?), we note that the pandemic significantly affected the development of podcasting in all the three countries surveyed, viewed through the prism of the most visited museums. Every institution investigated filled its productions with counter-pandemic activities, although to different levels of engagement. We must keep in mind that most museums analysed in Slovakia and Czechia were less active in this respect than the Polish ones. Their primary goal was to keep in contact with their community and engage the public in spite of lockdowns and travel restrictions. The museums' podcasts were not used for financial profit: all could be accessed for free. They may well have helped museums continue their mission despite the challenges of the pandemic. The response to the unprecedented situation was significant in terms of podcast creation, especially in Poland.

On this basis, the rather lively development of podcasting reached a level of stability, normalisation and rationalisation. This raises the idea of a modus vivendi, a meaningful podcasting space in the museum presentation space. In this sense, a future challenge for further research will be to determine whether this thesis is valid in the current period.

Finally, it should be stressed we do not mean to suggest that podcasts are somehow essential to museums' communications at critical times. However, they point to institutions' willingness to establish know-how and allocate human resources to potentially meaningful, value-added activities. Since museums are mostly based on a visitor-orientated visual experiences, it could be assumed that communication activities would primarily focus on mediating such experiences, for example, through virtual exhibitions, short videos, image galleries and so on. In this respect, the podcast opens up a new dimension by providing a verbalised museum experience and has the potential to create and cultivate a community that perceives a certain added value. From this perspective, then, the podcast can also be seen as a creative act of media transposition of an experience[66] from a visual and spatialised form to the dimension of a personalised (personally moderated) media text. Through podcasting, strict institutional communication takes on the contours of personalised communication, which has the potential to be a crucial element for museums' communication in the future.

Our study had some limitations. It referred to only a segment of public museums, selected due to their popularity. This selection makes it difficult to generate general statements which apply to all museums. However, the positionality of the selected museums lays the foundation for their wider social relevance, which we have attempted to reflected in our approach. Another limitation of our research was that it only focused on the years 2019 to 2022. It would be useful to include analysis of the post-pandemic podcasting activities by museums to demonstrate longer-term trends and developments in this area. Our approach also skips some elements of marketing perspective such as branding. Additionally, a broader focus on cultural institutions such as galleries or theatres could be an interesting avenue for future research.

However, even at present, our study brings significant contributions. It develops and complements the theoretical podcasting studies (both in general and through the specific lens of museums). It also offers a practical contribution by providing evidence that podcasts

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[66] On creativity in media production, see e.g. FICHNOVÁ, Katarína, WOJCIECHOWSKI, Łukasz, P. The Creative Process in the Virtual World in the Development of Ambient Campaign. In: *Studia ekonomiczne*, 16(317), 2017, pp. 93–105.

remain a relatively undeveloped digital platform in the museum sector, especially in terms of monetisation. For this reason, they could be a promising and practical area for cultural institutions' future marketing activities as a post-pandemic reality.

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