



Expanding museums' horizons through partnerships and collaboration

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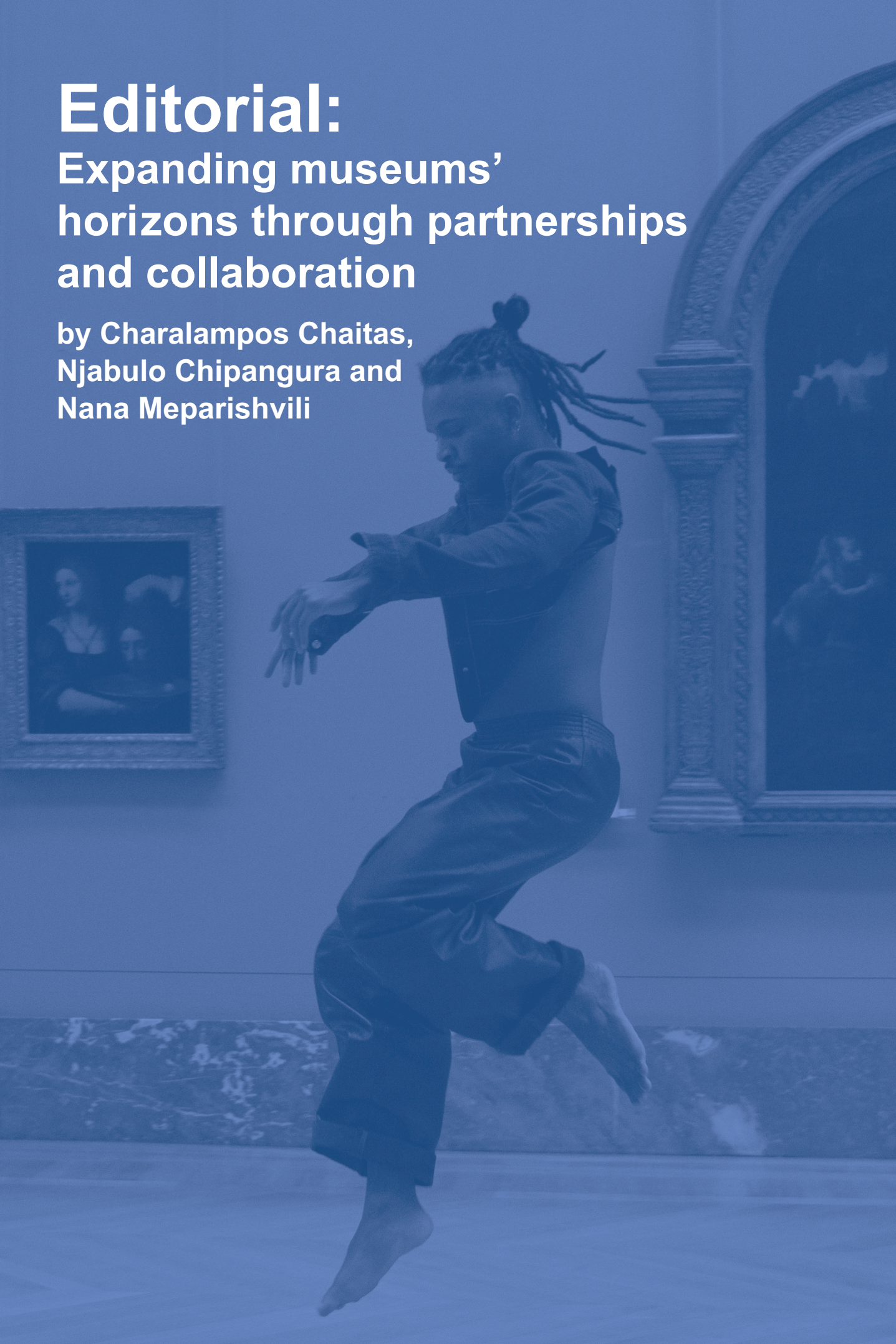
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Editorial: **Expanding museums’ horizons through partnerships and collaboration**

**by Charalampos Chaitas,
Njabulo Chipangura and
Nana Meparishvili**





Over the past two decades, our world has undergone rapid changes driven by significant challenges such as financial crises, pandemics, wars and escalating regional tensions between countries. These upheavals have profoundly affected the cultural and creative sectors, with many museums forced to close or reduce their operations and numerous museum professionals and partners facing layoffs. With each passing year, governmental support has steadily declined in some countries; for example, grant-in-aid funding for UK arts and cultural organisations fell by 18 per cent between 2010 and 2023 (House of Lords Library 2024), while in 2022, the EU allocated only 0.9 per cent of its total government expenditure to cultural services (European Commission 2022). These policies and decisions have significantly reshaped the cultural landscape of cities and communities worldwide.

Museums have accordingly been forced to explore fresh funding sources, expand their services and create new products, while being open to new forms of partnership and collaboration. This transition towards self-sustaining, diverse, multilayered revenue streams will allow them to achieve sustainable economic and operational futures, while providing a stable and secure employment environment for their staff and partners.

A high-level review of current trends and practices highlights examples of museums that have successfully built and utilised their brands and created branches in other cities, such as the Guggenheim, Centre Pompidou, and the Louvre. Other examples of museums that have made their mark through 'soft power' and international collaboration include the Smithsonian Inc., the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Science Museum Group. Furthermore, museums have become anchor institutions and 'character-makers' for real estate developments, bestowing on them a deeper sense of identity; examples of this include M+ and the Palace Museum in West Kowloon, as well as the museums (Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Zayed National Museum UAE) of Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi.

Museum leadership is increasingly open to exploring collaborations and partnerships with other sectors, including hospitality, health, environment, technology and social innovation. Now more than ever, museums, working as part of a

broader ecosystem of culture and creative industries, navigate their roles in new and broadened ways by entering into collaborations and partnerships with new business sectors. Despite clear challenges, museums are endeavouring to remain true to their core identities as agents of social change by including communities' voices and aspirations (Chipangura and Mataga 2021; Janes 2024). They thus respond to contemporary challenges while aiming to achieve financial self-sustainability, and exemplify sustainable values without losing their ethical principles (Janes and Sandell 2019, pp. 1-21; Janes 2016, pp. 88-90; Chynoweth *et al.* 2021, pp. 131-135).

For *Museum International*, the current moment presents an opportunity for professionals to seek valuable insights into partnership forms and modes that can enhance museums' profiles as economically viable and financially sustainable entities. We must reflect on the potential challenges, achievements, limitations and shortcomings that might arise from such partnerships, while addressing museums' broader financial concerns and exploring potential solutions – including the ethical dilemmas and issues these new collaborations raise. For the present volume we have thus chosen to present a collection of articles and interviews that showcase diverse topics and case studies related to the overall theme of 'Partnerships and Collaborations', and that provide valuable insights into innovative approaches to museum expansion. Readers will find key examples of how museums have partnered with numerous sectors, including gaming, hospitality, health, film, real estate and environmental groups.

One of the main themes that emerged while selecting the abstracts for this volume was the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. We have chosen to include five diverse articles exploring this subject, revealing a spectrum of opportunities and challenges. Ryan D. Jacobs discusses and critiques museums' growing reliance on corporate partnerships due to the limitations and decline of public funding support. He analyses cases of such partnerships from Canada, Britain, and Australia, underlining challenges around maintaining institutional independence and embracing pragmatic solutions for financially sustainable futures. It is interesting to see how Jacobs underlines the effort of the museum to safeguard its integrity and credibility while facing and navigating profit-driven motives from corporate partners.

Nevine Zakaria contributes to the debate around PPPs by drawing on new examples of Egyptian museums, notably the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), that have adopted the model. Her article illustrates how PPPs have provided a new operational model that encourages institutional autonomy, leveraging the country's expertise in hospitality, events management, business, food and beverage and retail sectors. The new model, representing an aggressive approach to sponsorship and donations, reinforced these sectors to create consortiums: ones that combine the necessary talents and skillsets to bolster museums by creating high-quality visitor services, drawing commercial agreements, diversifying museum revenue and attracting private investment. Overall, Zakaria's study emphasises the global relevance of hybrid governance models in achieving sustainability while safeguarding cultural missions.

In their case study, Julia Römhild and Nienke Wüst offer another interesting perspective on museum collaborations with leading corporations, examining the Kunstpalast Museum's partnership with energy giant E.ON. Their study provides insight into opportunities for resource-sharing and operational efficiency. However, it also exposes challenges and risks posed by such collaborations, including misaligned goals between partners and power-imbalanced relationships. The authors make the case for transparent agreements and mutual respect.

The last two papers in this first section are not directly connected to PPPs. Still, they contribute to ongoing discussions around the relationship between museums and corporate entities. Magdalena Lorenc's article explores the vital issue of copyright and intellectual property. Lorenc's analysis of the partnership between the National Museum in Poznań, Poland and the jams manufacturer Stovit Group stresses the complex interplay between commercialisation and institutional ethics. The two parties collaborated on the reproduction of images from the museum's collection on lids for fruit preserves. These sorts of initiatives, on the one hand, boost brand visibility and widen communication channels between museums and people who might otherwise never visit them. On the other hand, such partnerships pose challenges in understanding and achieving commercial interests with the museum's identity as a cultural custodian. Copyrights, intellectual property principles, and

best practices in these two areas further complicate these arrangements and challenge the partnerships. Lorenc highlights the delicate balance museums must maintain to enhance the brand image without undermining their ethical responsibilities or jeopardising their collections' integrity.

The last paper in this section, from Cécile Anger, looks at how museums are increasingly using brand licensing, allowing partners (licensees) to create products bearing an institution's brand. She argues that such types of partnerships have especially proliferated during the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the wide closure of museums. This deprived them of a primary source of income in the form of ticket sales; a need to diversify prompted them to rethink their business models to include licensing partnerships. Licensing itself can promote the visibility of museum collections, and at the same time can be regarded as a marketing strategy that facilitates revenue growth. Overall, collaborative partnerships that involve brand licensing have the potential to develop new revenue streams that can complement ticket sales and other traditional museum fundraising models. The paper also highlights that apart from brand licensing, museums are also hiring out spaces, selling merchandise and providing other services such as consulting and training workshops.

The second group of articles and interviews showcases the myriad roles that museums might take through different partnerships to address financial constraints and expand their impact in diverse domains, including (but not limited to) cultural diplomacy, copyright, hospitality, real estate, sustainability and health. These papers highlight museums' importance in influencing specific collaborations, expanding the museum's role as a steward of cultural heritage – and an active participant in societal transformation.

Museums have always been involved in international relations. Carla Figueira critiques traditional power-centric international relations, advocating for participatory methodologies that safeguard the mutual respect of all parties involved in museum partnerships. The case study she proposes on the partnership between the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Maasai communities of East Africa exemplifies this approach: one in which the Maasai community actively engaged in reinterpreting the PRM's colonial-era collections, develop a narrative, and foster a process of healing and reconciliation.

Another major sector in which museums both exert a strong influence and are themselves influenced is hospitality. We had the privilege to discuss this relationship in depth with Alice Gray Stites of 21c Museum Hotels, the most progressive example of how the museum and hospitality sectors have partnered to create a new business model. Stites describes how a contemporary art museum can be combined with a luxury hotel, creating a brand with all the essential ingredients from both sectors. 21c Museum Hotels aims to create accessible, hybrid spaces that operate as cultural hubs, promoting community engagement, supporting local creative businesses and economies, and providing a financially sustainable framework for art programming. Stites acknowledges the fine line between commercial hospitality objectives and the museum's not-for-profit, learning and community-building mission, but emphasises that this model can yield a transformative potential that broadens inclusivity, accessibility and equal opportunity in the arts while safeguarding institutional integrity.

Another important sector that has dominated discussions around museum partnerships in the for the last two decades is real estate. Collaborations between museums and real estate developers might provide new avenues of financial sustainability and societal impact for all parties. In their article, Adrian Ellis and Jake Hiebert demonstrate how cultural infrastructure investments enhance property values and urban regeneration, while bolstering the identity of a destination or city. While these strategic partnerships can offer mutual benefits, the authors underline the importance of aligning economic growth with museum mission goals through transparent and equitable collaborative agreements – thus preventing the risk of over-commercialisation, and actions that are not aligned with museums' central objectives and values.

Next, the case study from Max Pérez Fallik and Ana Saint Jean explores the partnership-centred approach of the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA) in aiming for an economically stable present and future. In recent years, Argentina has faced multiple economic challenges that have impacted the financial stability of many cultural organisations. In response, MALBA has adopted a patron-centred approach to its partnerships and collaborations, which has allowed it to function as a hub and platform that brings partners together while creating alternative revenue streams, thereby balancing the needs of the museum,

surrounding communities, sponsors, donors and other supporters. The authors notably stressed a collaboration between MALBA's Development and Educational Department and a national stationery company that facilitated many community activities and programmes. This case study shows how a museum might support its cultural mission while achieving greater financial sustainability.

The final group of papers in this volume highlight partnership initiatives directly related to museums' audiences: ones that expand institutions' social roles, open to new audience segments and/or focus on diverse communities. First, Antonia Ivo and Alice Guillard interview Éric Delpont, Director of the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris, and Romain Fascialé, Project Manager for Cultural Partnerships at games developer Ubisoft, to discuss the exhibition *Baghdad: A Journey Back to Madinat al-Salam with Assassin's Creed® Mirage*, a joint effort merging cultural heritage and gaming. This partnership was initiated by Ubisoft during the development of *Assassin's Creed Mirage*, with IMA providing expertise and artefacts from its collection. This led to the creation of an exhibition that showcases the creative process of historical recreation during the development of the video game and educates the public on the Abbasid civilisation. The collaboration was also informed by Ubisoft's prior experience on the project *Cités millénaires*, which employed Virtual Reality (VR) to revive historical sites. The success of this partnership notably lay in attracting new audiences to the museum and promoting cultural innovation despite the challenges of reconciling digital and physical media within the exhibition.

The next article, from Joseph Ssebunya, Philip Balimuni, Emmanuel Ssemwanga, Aidah Nakitende, and Amon Mugume, describes the efforts of the BRIMS Heritage Resource Center in Uganda to address e-waste (electronic waste) through digital heritage conservation, promoting a sustainable framework for its re-use under the principles of the circular economy. BRIMS was established in 2021 and focuses on working with e-waste traders and local communities to collect and exhibit discarded electronic devices and other technological items in a museum collection that can be visited upon appointment. The centre uses strategies and methods such as travelling exhibitions, vintage van displays and community engagement activities to highlight the cultural and historical significance of e-waste and connect it with everyday life, providing

education on recycling, sustainability and responsible use. Since 2022, BRIMS has collected over 3,000 e-waste items and restored over 100 to prior functional status, while preserving others as display items.

The next article, from Chenyixue Ma, explores how museums can collaborate with hospitals to promote health and well-being, as well as better highlight hospital collections by displaying them in museum settings. The 2022 *Ogentroost* exhibition at the Museum de Bruijtenplaats in the Netherlands exemplifies the potential of collaborations between hospitals and museums. Netherlands-based organisations like Thomassen à Thuessink have adopted new partnership strategies to display hospitals' artwork collections in museums as well as better highlighting artworks within healthcare settings, thus creatively fusing the objectives of both sectors. Ma's research also shows how hospital art collections can aid in the recovery, healing and well-being of patients, their relatives and hospital staff. This approach attracts new and diverse audiences to appreciate hospitals' collections, and fosters increased well-being as well as a more inclusive cultural landscape. Overall, it shows the potential for forging stronger bonds between two sectors that have largely operated separately until now.

Meanwhile, Juan Pablo Zamora Rodriguez explores partnership opportunities between dance and museums, in an article that reveals dynamic intersections between both sectors and compelling new horizons for cultural institutions. Through case studies of the Central Bank Museum in Costa Rica and the Musée du Louvre in France, Zamora Rodriguez offers evidence for how dance enriches museum spaces by fostering audience engagement, challenging traditional narratives and promoting inclusivity. The article also emphasises the potential for museum and dance collaborations to bolster financial stability and promote greater engagement with diverse communities.

In the final contribution, Alice Guillard interviews Stéphanie Hussonnois-Bouhayati, Director of External Relations and Communication at the Louvre, and discusses the recent partnership between the museum, Warner Bros. and Lady Gaga to create an iconic promotional video for the feature film *Joker: Folie à Deux* and an upcoming exhibition. The video was released in September 2024, ahead of the film's October premiere and the opening of the Louvre's temporary exhibition, *Figures*

du Fou. The exhibition explored representations of madness through history and notably explored modern depictions of the fool figure. The video attracted over 17 million views, and notably shows Lady Gaga's character at the Louvre, painting the Joker's unsettling, wide smile over the *Mona Lisa*. This partnership offers an excellent example of how collaborations might use pop culture to highlight works of classic art, and help to refresh the image of well-established cultural institutions.

This issue of *Museum International* has brought together diverse contributions that together illustrate the power of partnerships and collaboration in reshaping the role of the museum, while expanding revenue streams, available resources and audiences. It thus represents a sound basis for museums to explore their futures, offering expansive new perspectives on partnerships and on sectors with which to potentially forge collaborations.

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