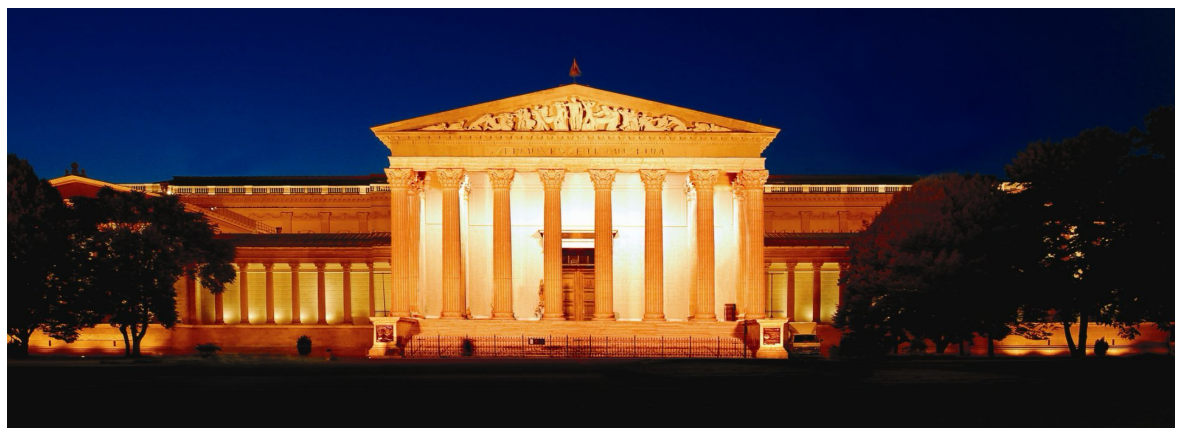


How does political polarization influence the governance of public museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?

Governance Under Pressure: A Comparative Content Analysis of Museum Governance in Politically Polarized Contexts, Hungary and the Netherlands



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Preface

Throughout my Master in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship, I observed a period of ongoing cuts to cultural funding in the Netherlands. These changes left me with questions as well as concerns, wondering: “how can we preserve the future of the creative industries if cultural institutions are constantly under financial pressure?”. Therefore, such uncertainty inspired my thesis. I wanted to go beyond just noticing the issue, to really understand where these pressures come from. Moreover, while talking with some Hungarian friends of mine, I realized this is an issue happening also in different areas of the world, more specifically of Europe. As a result, I decided to study in depth the subject matter and compare two different polarized places in the same analysis.

The study highlights a broader point: cultural policies do more than distribute money or serve political ends, they help form social cohesion, collective identity, and our routine encounters with culture.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Dr. Carlotta Scioldo, my supervisor, for her continuous assistance and direction throughout every stage of this long journey, you really helped me feel less lost throughout the process.

I’m also deeply grateful to my parents, who have always believed in me, and to my boyfriend, Basile, as well as closest friends, whose encouragement carried me through one of the most challenging (but rewarding!) stages of my life.

Thanks to my older brothers who are always there to help and support whenever I need it.

Abstract

This thesis explores how political polarization affects the museums governance and cultural engagement. By comparing two European countries with contrasting political climates, such as Hungary and the Netherlands, this research investigates how national museums interpret political shifts, governance models, and the ideological use of cultural institutions.

Thus, using a comparative content analysis, the study gathers information from different political and cultural official reports. Informing the study with only official observations. The results underscore that political interference not only influence how museums operate but also impact access to culture, museums programming, as well as the general well-being of society.

The study shows the significance of aligning cultural policy with societal needs and shows the role of public in shaping sustainable, inclusive cultural institutions in an increasingly polarized Europe.

Key words: Political polarization, funding cuts, cultural engagement, cultural policy, social impact, governance structure.

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Introduction

In recent years increasing political polarization has significantly reshaped cultural policy, particularly affecting museum funding and governance. Graham, Amos, and Plumptre (2003) define governance as “the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say.”, stressing the mechanism in which economical and social decisions are usually obtained (Graham, Amos, & Plumptre, 2003, p.2). Moreover, governance, in the museum's context, manages fundings, curatorial autonomy, and institutional accountability. To assess the quality of cultural managerial practices, the same authors proposed five principles key to define good governance : legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness (Graham, Amos, & Plumptre, 2003, Policy Brief No. 15).

Public (national) museums, due to their high visibility and reliance on state funding, are notably susceptible to political pressure and influence (International Council of Museums, 2025). Consequently, when governance structures become politicized, museums often face pressure to align with specific ideological viewpoints. In this way they can mitigate the risk of budget cuts or funding losses (REMA–EEMN, 2024). This vulnerability, compounded by financial constraints, governance reorganizations, and pressure to conform to political agendas, increasingly draws museums into ideological conflicts. Especially since they navigate their roles as stewards of cultural heritage and social identity (NEMO, 2025). The rise of populism has further intensified these dynamics, drastically shifting political agendas and fueling debates over how museums should reflect national identity, memory, and cultural values. (NEMO, 2025). Therefore, the aim of this research is to delve deeper into the topic of political polarization and its influence on public, hence, national museums’ governance in countries with different degrees of polarization. It is evident from recent scholarship and journalism that Hungary has an increase in government interventions in museum programming as well as leadership appointments (Compendium Cultural Policy, 2025). Contrastingly to the Netherlands, which mainly faces moderate polarization and financial pressures, leading to the promotion of pluralistic and participatory cultural governance model (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2025). However, the economic crisis in 2018 serves as a natural experiment in funding cuts and financial constraints in the cultural sector in the Netherlands. This changes help us appreciate the risks of ideological reinforcement in polarized environments. Additionally, it is vital to recognize the differences between fully publicly funded museums, mixed models, as well as independent/private museums, when analyzing the sector. Precisely, public museums accept public donations and are financially sustain by the ministries. Meanwhile private, so-called independent, museums are usually funded by an individual, as well as a small group of private donors. Therefore they are not obligated to answer to as many stakeholders as

public/national ones (Northern Trust, n.d.). Finally, mixed models' museums are usually publicly subsidized, usually with the help of private sponsorship or NGO oversight (Michaels, 2017).

Political actors' influence on cultural policy and the decline in funding for the arts are not recent developments. Such breakthroughs have historically emerged in reaction to political instability, changes in governmental power, or economic crises. To illustrate, the year 2008 represented a period during which economic crises led to a reduction in public funding for the arts (Lerer & McGarrigle, 2018). Governments, therefore, preferred to promote the allocation of their resources to social welfare and banking rather than the museum sector. Therefore, due to funding cuts, museums had to diversify their income sources, increasingly relying on private sponsorships and commercial initiatives, as public funding for the arts was deprioritized (Lerer & McGarrigle, 2018). Nevertheless, contemporary political polarization has added an ideological dimension to cultural policy, reflecting Duignan's (2023) explanation regarding the ways institutions are funded and marginalized based on their perceived alignment with prevailing political agendas.

This thesis will enquire how, beyond economic pressures, political polarization introduces an ideological dimension to museum funding and governance. By examining this phenomenon in the context of Hungary and the Netherlands, the thesis aims to clarify the societal and academic relevance of these shifts, exploring how political polarization may alter the ways in which national museums are funded, managed, and perceived as public institutions. Hence, through the implementation of ideological criteria into funding allocation, museums face conflicts over government (Duignan, 2023). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, in Eastern European countries such as Hungary, the transition from communist regimes to liberal democracies led to a restructuring of cultural policies (CEEOL, 2018). Specifically, the current dynamics of political divisiveness and funding cuts are strongly based on historical examples in which similar traits, such as reduced support to cultural institutions, were examined. As museums are increasingly entangled in political debates over national identity, memory, and public funding, they have become central actors in the broader discussion around cultural governance. In this context, it is crucial to examine how political polarization is reshaping not only the allocation of resources, but institutional independence of museums. Thus, in highly politicized environments, cultural institutions are used as theatres of ideological conflict, in which funding and governance mechanisms are shaped by the alignment of institutions with specific political values. This dynamic is observed as duality: Contemporary political polarization adds an ideological dimension to cultural funding decisions, shaping the way creative institutions are funded and organized, as resources are often granted or denied based on perceived alignment with political values. Public cultural and creative institutions that mostly depend on subsidies, like museums, are therefore extremely susceptible to these changes. Unlike private organizations, which primarily rely on income streams rather than political dynamics, private organizations are typically more conscious of financial and political instability. However, because political and financial decisions may affect access to and involvement

with cultural services, this trend affects not only cultural organizations but also public museums which must negotiate their survival in ideological and conflictual climates. Making museums both cultural significant as well as fragile.

According to the *NEMO* (2025), political influence is highly affecting museums, “Threatening their independence and reputation as impartial institutions” (NEMO, 2025). In particular, the Barometer indicates that a sizable portion of individuals (70%), believes that polarization is increasing in their nations, also showing how museums reports this issue due to political circumstances (NEMO, 2025). Key findings highlight the main themes of political instability in museums, including:

- 1) **Funding and budgetary constraints:** particularly for state-dependent museums, impacting budget cuts
- 2) **Influence on public actions:** terminating exhibitions, cancelling politically sensitive exhibitions
- 3) **Political interference in governance:** including appointments of directors and board members, as well as pressure to align with political agendas
- 4) **Pressure from interest groups and public opinion influence:** Censorship, self-censorship, and public statements affecting museums independence (Nemo,2025, p.6)

Based on the following results:

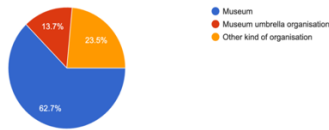
The results enable the illustration of political pressure on European museums. Showcasing how nearly 76,2% of the national museums organizations is influenced by political choices, especially regarding funding and institutional leadership. Moreover, six out of ten museums feel that museum’s programming are subject to governmental decisions (NEMO, 2025, pp. 4–5). Additionally, data demonstrates how a significant portion of the European population perceives an escalation in political polarization within their region. The 71.4% national museums organizations feel the presence of government polarization in their countries. However, regions are not specified in the data observed, portraying a trend that is likely able to compromise museum autonomy (NEMO, 2025, pp.7-8). Highlighting the essential need of museums to overcome the political turbulences that affect them, as well as their role in the context of rising polarization (NEMO, 2025, p.8).

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

Type of organisation responding

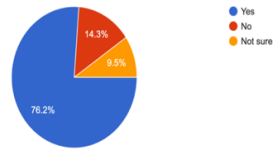
153 responses



Almost two thirds of the respondents of the questionnaire are individual museums. It is interesting however that national museum umbrella organisations from 13 different European countries responded, providing a general overview of the national sector level situation.

Responses from national museum organisations

21 responses



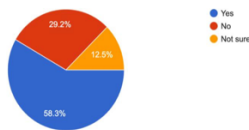
More than three quarters of national museum organisations respond that the museums in their country are subject to political pressure, while only 14% state that they feel museums are not subject to political pressure.

POLITICAL PRESSURE ON MUSEUMS

The questionnaire asked museums, national museum organisations and other organisations individually about their perception on whether museums are subject to political pressure.

Responses from museums

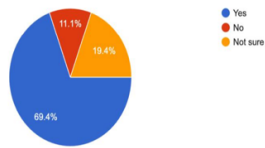
96 responses



Almost 6 out of 10 museums responded that they feel that their museum's vision or (parts of its) programme is subject to political pressure. Almost 3 out of 10 museums responded they do not feel their museum is subject to political pressure.

Responses from other organisations

36 responses



Almost 7 out of 10 other organisations respond that museums are subject to political pressure in their country. Only 1 in 10 organisations responded that museums are not subject to political pressure.

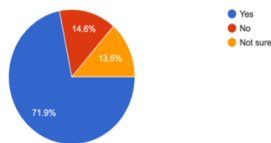
(NEMO,2025, p.4-5)

THE RISE OF POLARISATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSEUMS

The questionnaire wanted to know if respondents feel there is a rise of polarisation in their country in general.

Responses of museums

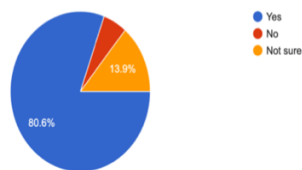
96 responses



More than 7 in 10 museums feel that there is a rise of polarisation in their countries. Only 1.5 museums out of 1 do not feel that there is a rise of polarisation in their countries.

Responses of other organisations

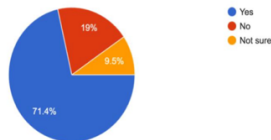
36 responses



More than 8 in 10 other organisations feel that there is a rise of polarisation in their countries. Less than 1 out of 10 do not feel that there is a rise of polarisation in their countries.

Responses of national museum organisations

21 responses



More than 7 in 10 national museum organisations feel that there is a rise of polarisation in their countries. Less than 2 out of 10 do not feel that there is a rise in polarisation in their countries.

(NEMO,2025, p.7-8)

Given these trends, the research aligns with the NEMO (2025) conclusions regarding the four main forms of political interference. Showcasing how museums are not simply facing financial challenges, but also ideological manipulation as well as curatorial and programming limitations.

The research will explore the main question: “How does political polarization influence the governance of public museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?”, as reflected in policy and strategic discourse. Therefore, the aim is to understand how governance is structured, controlled, described, and ideologically shaped. Followed by three relevant sub-questions that would help addressing the matter:

- 1) What governance structures and logics are articulated in policy and strategy documents related to museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?
- 2) How do governance priorities differ between a highly polarized (Hungary) and a moderately polarized (Netherlands) political context?

The thesis follows a specific structure, starting with the Introduction chapter 1, following a literature review assigned to Chapter 2. The literature review delves into existing research regarding museum governance, political polarization as well as general cultural policies and European reports. Chapter 3 examines the methodology of this research, focusing on a comparative qualitative design, reflecting on the use of contents as well as the design of the data analysis. Also expanding the explanation of data sources used across Hungary and the Netherlands. Moreover, Chapter 4 outlines the results of the data collections, presenting the thematic findings across seven themes supported by quotes and codes. Lastly, Chapter 5, which reflects the conclusion of the study, synthesized the key findings obtained throughout the research:

- the ideological influence on museum governance in Hungary
- the arm's-length funding structure in the Netherlands
- The differences in institutional autonomy between both countries

Thus, exploring limitations, as well as practical implications and suggestions for future research on the subject.

Chapter 2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter defines the theoretical foundations of this study, in order to understand topics such as political polarization, cultural governance, institutional resilience, as well as museums governance and autonomy. This will help us also ground the nature of Hungary and the Netherlands as comparative case studies. Moreover, theoretical literature and empirical findings help contextualizing how governance in the museum sector is affected by shifting political landscapes, public discourse, and funding pressures.

The significance of social and cultural impacts of the choices of policymakers, especially in public discourse, is often underestimated. Whether for immediate electoral gain or long term campaigns, long term changes to public discourse or conventional wisdom are not really the first concern of politicians. This oversight can lead to public frustration and lower trust in institutions, particularly when the public can notice that cultural funding is deprioritized in favor of economic or social objectives (Dieckmann et al., 2021). Furthermore, research rooted in cultural theory and the psychometric paradigm where people are required to measure their bias indicates that individuals' worldviews and cultural values substantially influence their perception of risk and their expectations of policy goals (Ripberger et al., 2017). This shows the critical importance of integrating cultural values into policy-making to make sure that governance choices align with society's wants and needs. Not only through a symbolic meaning, rather as guides that influence how decisions are taken, made, who benefits from them and if they align with the general public expectations. Through this, governments can increase national public trust, as well as civic welfare and reduce the discontent between governments, institutions and the public itself. In this way they can preserve legitimacy and relevance of societal values. Therefore, the objective here is not to analyze each factor in isolation but instead to investigate how the different influences play out within two distinct political and institutional environments: Hungary and the Netherlands. This thesis therefore wants to assess how changes in governance and financial frameworks mirror ongoing political trends and how museums are not isolated from current discourse and have to respond to these changes.

Furthermore, citizens often prioritize social and cultural considerations over economic or environmental factors when evaluating public policies (Dieckmann et al., 2021). Emphasizing the

importance of public opinion, not just for their role in shaping cultural investments, but also in validating institutions when evaluating cultural policies and decision-making processes, especially in museums (Dieckmann et al., 2021). This trend can be noticed often in European countries such as Hungary and the Netherlands, where governments reallocate fundings to fix immediate economic and social difficulties, without thinking of the consequences in the long term, often at the expense of culture and society. Thus, popular views may represent fundamental socioeconomic divisions, reflecting the risk of culture to be sidelined. In this scenario, the Netherlands represents a midway ground, providing insights into how moderate polarization effects national institutions, in contrast with higher polarized places such as Hungary.

This study aims to answer the main research question:

1. How does political polarization influence the governance of public museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?

However, two different sub questions have been considered relevant to address the topic, such as:

- 1) What governance structures and logics are articulated in policy and strategy documents related to museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?
- 2) How do governance priorities differ between a highly polarized (Hungary) and a moderately polarized (Netherlands) political context?

Addressing those questions is important since they concern the fundamental mechanisms through which political factors influence the accessibility and consequently the value of museums. Also touching points regarding the broader impact of political and economic pressures on cultural engagement and societal cohesion. By assessing the extent to which funding cuts and polarization impacts society, the research wants to shed information on the ways these changes influence innovation, social cohesion and cultural engagement in the population.

2.2 Significance of the study

This thesis investigates the relationship between political polarization and the governance of public museums, focusing on Hungary and the Netherlands as comparative case studies. This approach helps us see it as part of a bigger picture, especially considering a rising trend of populism happening around the world. Addressing a vital concern for cultural institutions worldwide through the lived experiences of citizens and the operational realities of museums. This research explores how museums try to handle increasing political pressure while at the same time, they have to keep doing their essential job as cultural custodians and public spaces. While taking care of the commons and being open, welcoming places for everyone despite problems. As a student of cultural economics and

entrepreneurship, this topic holds significant relevance, given how political polarization increasingly threatens the vitality and social welfare of the museum sector.

In this regard, studies such as Bonet and Calvano's (2023) *Measuring the social dimension of culture* (MESOC) provide a crucial framework. Their work aims to quantify the societal value and impact of cultural policies and activities can have on society in different European countries. Offering significant insights into how society and culture influence each other. This perspective shows that cultural policies extend beyond mere economic instruments. Hence, not only looking at money but to also seeing the real effects on people. For instance, museums are not separate but essential components for both cultural creation and broader social welfare; by promoting social cohesion, educational outreach, and inclusive dialogue (Bonet & Calvano, 2023). Which democratic values, collective memory and identity are promoted through museums as a means of fostering a sense of togetherness. Thus, acting as stabilising forces in contrast to social resilience and civic trust. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity written by Lamotte (2002) emphasizes that cultural diversity is as essential for humanity as biodiversity is for nature. Resulting as a catalyst for innovation and creativity within societies (Lamotte, 2002). This declaration also stresses on the crucial role that raising awareness about the implications of cultural policies concerning sustainability, funding fluctuations, and overall societal wellbeing, has formed engagement with the public. Museums fundamentally uphold and are at the heart of UNESCO's principles. As vital institutions, they dedicate themselves to preserving and presenting cultural narratives, which in turn cultivates historical awareness and a collective sense of identity. Despite this vital role, the already cited reports from organizations like NEMO, *Network of European Museum Organisations*, (2025) indicate that museums are increasingly targeted by political agendas. Therefore, they are threatens their independence and compromises their capacity to function as neutral cultural spaces (NEMO, 2025).

This chapter explains some conceptual boundaries of political polarization and museum governance. Exploring established theories of museum governance, analyzing mechanisms of political interference, and discussing concepts of institutional autonomy and resilience.

2.3 Political Polarization and Museum Governance

Political polarization increasingly characterizes contemporary societies, profoundly influencing public life, governance, and the operational environment for cultural institutions. Hence, McCoy et al. (2018) define this phenomenon as the divergence of political attitudes towards ideological extremes. As well as, away from the center resulting in societies where individuals and groups increasingly clustering away from common ground and around opposing poles. This section of the literature review will try to understand the concept of political polarization. Moreover, propose and analyse some of its

main causes, and discuss its wide-ranging effects on cultural life and public discourse. Thereby, aiming to establish a foundational context for understanding the pressures public museums now face.

Understanding polarization requires acknowledging the many ways it works through society. A key distinction in academic literature is between ideological polarization and affective polarization. Ideological polarization refers to the extent to which parts of political elites and the public hold divergent and internally consistent policy positions (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008). This means that individuals or parties align more predictably along a progressive to conservative spectrum, reducing the common ground for policy compromise and even healthy dialogue. On the other hand, affective polarization describes the emotional aspect of these divisions such as the increasing dislike, distrust, and hatred of people from the opposite political party or opposing political beliefs (good vs bad), and increasing loyalty to one's own partisan group (Iyengar et al, 2012). As Hartevelt et al., (2022) highlight, emotions and identity can become powerful drivers of these divisions, with phenomena like ethnicity and populism playing central roles in growing such partisan hostility. This distinction is important because affective divisions can exist and deepen even where fierce policy disagreements are not extreme and can regularly produce high friction in society.

The causes of increasing polarization involve a complex interaction of factors on which there is not yet academic consensus. Elite-level dynamics play a significant role, with newcoming political leaders and parties trying to differentiate themselves from opponents and “the old guard” by adopting more polarized stances to mobilize supporters (Pappas, 2019). Although this study concentrates on Europe, the worldwide rise of populist radical-right parties has been linked to sharper mass polarization by opening new political divides and casting public debate in 'us versus them' terms (Silva, 2017). Yet elite actions alone cannot justify this global trend, and wider societal changes have to be considered to understand polarization. While materialist scholarship will directly point at socio-economic factors like inequality and economic insecurity which can create fertile ground for divisive political narratives, contemporary societies face many other long-term changes in social identities which foster the rise of value-based or cultural divisions. For instance, debates around national identity, sovereignty, and multiculturalism, are made worse by tech platforms. Especially since society is not yet adjusted to it.

Such polarization shapes and affects governance and societal expectations of cultural institutions, through an increased scrutiny over the narratives which institutions, such as museums, presents. Often the labelling of certain exhibitions as 'unpatriotic' and controversial is a common occurrence. Particularly in cases where the exhibitions challenge dominant ideologies or fail to align with nationalistic sentiments. Hence, Pausch (2021) discusses the growing distinction between communitarian, emphasizing national sovereignty and traditional values, and cosmopolitan outlooks in Europe. Countries like Hungary under Orbán often cited as examples of a strong push towards

communitarian and nationalist values (Kreko & Enyedi, 2018). The media, particularly the rise of social media and partisan news outlets on the internet, is also frequently considered as a driver of polarization. While the precise impact is still unsure, with methodological difficulties in the face of endogeneity, there are concerns that digital platforms can create "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles". In which individuals are primarily exposed to ideologically information without any external discourse creeping in, with algorithms designed to reinforcing existing beliefs and potentially increasing animosity towards out-groups (Sunstein, 2017).

Political polarization damages cultural life and public discourse in serious ways. It breaks down social trust. People become less tolerant of other groups, and meaningful conversations across political lines grow harder (Iyengar et al., 2012). Public debates turn hostile and drift away from real policy issues toward symbolic fight and identity politic. This divisions hurt a country's overall health, especially when they lead to poor governance. Museums cannot escape the political tensions that grip society. They become battlegrounds where competing worldviews clash. The narratives they present, the historical interpretations they offer, and their funding mechanisms all face mounting ideological pressure (NEMO, 2025). Political actors now see museums as useful tools for pushing their agendas and shaping national narratives. This instrumentalization chips away at public trust in these institutions (NEMO, 2025). Money follows politics. Funding flows to museums that seem to align with powerful ideological currents rather than those with genuine artistic merit or cultural significance. The public doesn't evaluate policies in a vacuum. Citizens bring their social and cultural perspectives to bear when judging public initiatives (Dieckmann et al., 2021), and their core worldviews inevitably shape how they understand policy goals (Ripberger et al., 2017). Museums feel the squeeze from both the direct political interference represented by the blunt approach common in Hungary, to a more insidious quiet pressure that leads to self-censorship and preemptive compliance in the name of causes that have not been necessarily publicly approved. Therefore, curators second-guess themselves while administrators avoid controversial topics to play it safe. Both forms of pressure undermine the institutional independence that museums require to serve as genuine forums where different communities can come together for dialogue and reflection (NEMO, 2025).

Hence changes in government priorities and political power lead to the development of significant obstacles to institutional autonomy and public confidence which are presented by the increasing political meddling in museum management, funding arrangements, and curatorial freedom, according to the NEMO (2025). Political polarization and museum governance connect in diverse ways indicated in three main ones:

- 1) **Museums as Political Instruments:** In highly polarized settings, governments are increasingly using museums to promote dominant ideological narratives and influence collective memory. Rather than operating as impartial cultural venues, museums are frequently charged with promoting political legitimacy or censoring opposing histories (NEMO, 2025).

- 2) **Funding as a Political Tool:** Governments frequently use financial decisions to reflect their political agendas, giving or refusing support according to the beliefs of the ruling party, showcasing how state funding, in these case, no longer a neutral resource but a mechanism of control. Affecting what can be exhibited, programmed, or sustained (Turkey's Museums Struggle Amid Political Polarization, 2024).
- 3) **Governance Restructuring:** Political influence frequently affect museum leadership and board appointments, which affects curatorial independence and institutional decision-making (Can We Talk? Polarization in Museums, 2024).

Building on these concepts, this thesis takes a comparative case study approach, centring upon two countries, Hungary and the Netherlands, with varying degrees of political polarization and cultural policy frameworks.

To conduct a thorough and methodical investigation of this relationship, four museums will be chosen: one state-funded and one independent institution in each country. This selection enables a controlled comparison of how institutional type (public vs. private) interacts with national political environment, specializing on funding mechanisms, governance changes, and curatorial independence.

2.4 Museum Governance Structures and Political Interference in Cultural Institutions

As political polarization intensifies across the continent as discussed in section 3.1 museums increasingly find their governance structures tested and their autonomy challenged. Traditionally, European museums operated under various models, often broadly categorized as centralized, under direct state control, state-funded but with operational independence via intermediary bodies like arts councils (arm's length), or mixed models (Belfiore, 2002). The "arm's length" principle emerged from post-war Europe as a way to protect artistic and curatorial freedom from political interference. Politicians would provide funding but would pretend to stay out of creative decisions and not know what the creatives were doing (Mangset, 2009). While in theory it sounded like a rational (and logical) way to divide duties and influences, in practice European countries adopted this principle in wildly different ways. Nordic nations created arts councils but kept powerful culture ministries running alongside them. Other countries chose different paths entirely. Today, the principle faces serious challenges. New public management philosophies question whether cultural institutions deserve such protection from oversight. Political landscapes shift constantly, and each change brings fresh pressures

on cultural independence (Copic & Srakar, 2012). The arm's length principle remains more aspiration than reality in many contexts.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries brought significant shifts, influenced by *New Public Management* (NPM) reforms. NPM introduced quasi-market mechanisms, an emphasis on efficiency, performance indicators, and managerial autonomy, pushing museums towards more entrepreneurial and audience-focused approaches (Copic & Srakar, 2012). This led to a diversification of governance structures, including increased corporatization, the rise of public-private partnerships, and the development of hybrid models (Mendoza & Talevera, 2025). In response to these changes and the identified vulnerabilities in museum governance, particularly in regions like Central and Eastern Europe, there has been a growing call for the adoption of explicit cultural governance codes. Building on the previously discussed principles of good governance, such codes aim to formalize principles of clear mission definition. As well as checks and balances, transparency, defined board roles and responsibilities, stakeholder engagement, and ethical conduct, to enhance professionalism and shield museums from undue influence (King & Schramme, 2022). Scholars like *Annick Schramme* have been very influential in developing and advocating for such codes, some of which have even been integrated into national legislation, for example, in Flanders.

Funding frameworks are inextricably linked to governance and autonomy. The widespread trend of declining direct public funding has compelled museums to diversify income streams, increasingly relying on self-generated revenue, private sponsorship, and project-based grants (International Council of Museums, 2025; EMA, 2025). While hybrid funding models can offer flexibility, they also introduce new complexities and potential vulnerabilities. As a result, over-reliance on private or corporate funding can lead to concerns about donor influence or mission drift, while project-based public funding can steer activities towards politically favoured themes (International Council of Museums, 2025; NEMO, 2025). The drive for financial autonomy and self-sufficiency can also subtly shift institutional priorities, potentially at the expense of core scholarly or preservation functions if not carefully managed (International Council of Museums, 2025).

Political interference in cultural institutions, particularly museums, can manifest in both direct and indirect forms. The NEMO Barometer on political influence in museums in Europe (2025) and reports by International Council of Museums (2020) and CIMAM (2022) all point to the same kinds of political pressure on museums. Direct interference often involves:

- Control over appointments: By appointing people who share their views to key leadership posts, officials can nudge the institution's narrative and agenda (CIMAM, 2022; European Museum Academy, 2025).

- Funding allocation and conditions: budgets can be slashed or grants loaded with conditions to steer organizations toward the government's agenda (NEMO, 2025; European Museum Academy, 2025).
- Influence on programming and exhibitions: Direct pressure to cancel or alter specific exhibitions in order to match political ideologies (NEMO, 2025; Council of Europe, 2023).

Indirect pressures are often more insidious but equally impactful. These include fostering a climate where self-censorship becomes prevalent among museum professionals who fear issues for programming or research perceived as controversial or critical of the authorities (Council of Europe, 2023). Incentives for ideological alignment, such as preferential treatment or access to resources for compliant institutions, can also subtly shape museum practices. The Council of Europe's (2023) report *Free to Create* shows that administrative barriers and strategic lawsuits can suppress artistic and cultural expression within institutions. Reports indicate that this kind of interference is especially pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe, though it can be found, to varying degrees, elsewhere as well (CIMAM, 2022; European Museum Academy, 2025).

2.5 Institutional Autonomy and Resilience

Institutional autonomy is important for museums since it fulfils their societal roles as spaces for critical inquiry, diverse narratives, and cultural heritage preservation. Scholars often ground their arguments for autonomy in the arm's-length approach and in broader notions of artistic and cultural freedom (Mangset, 2009; Council of Europe, 2023). The "Museum Activism" discourse further suggests that museums engaging with contemporary social and political issues assert their relevance and a form of autonomy by challenging dominant narratives rather than passively reflecting them (Janes & Sandell, 2019).

Growing political pressure, fueled by rising polarization, does not lead to cultural institutions such as museums and libraries being simply passive victims (Hanell et al., 2024). Strategies for maintaining autonomy and building institutional resilience include:

- Developing and adhering to robust governance codes: Supported by King & Schramme (2022) clear internal governance frameworks can provide a bulwark against external pressures and enhance transparency and accountability.
- Ethical and visionary leadership: Strong Museum leadership is crucial for navigating complex political environments, advocating for institutional integrity, and fostering resilience in culture (International Council of Museums, 2022).

- Diversifying funding sources strategically: While seeking diverse funding, maintaining ethical guidelines and transparency to avoid undue influence from any single source (International Council of Museums, 2025).
- Building strong stakeholder and community alliances: Engaging with and demonstrating value to a broad range of stakeholders and the local community can create a supportive network that advocates for the museum's independence (Beatriz Garcia et al., 2018)
- Upholding professional ethics and standards: Adherence to internationally recognized ethical codes, such as the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, provides a normative framework for decision-making and professional conduct. (International Council of Museums, 2022).
- International collaboration and solidarity: Networking with international museum organizations and peers can usually offer support, share best practices, and apply collective pressure against excessive interference (International Council of Museums, 2022).

2.6 Digitalization, Technology, and Museum Governance

This section highlights digitalization and technical innovations, considered as means of narrative control especially through institutions, influencing the governance of museums. Therefore, the political context greatly affects what is shown, withheld, or suppressed as museums choose digital channels to distribute materials. Hence, analyzing how digital governance interacts with museum operations and public memory, is important since it stresses its consequences for institutional autonomy and curatorial freedom.

The importance of digital governance in shaping public historical narratives is underlined by NEMO (2024), particularly in countries where governments limit online access to politically sensitive museum material. For example, during the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian museums were forced to remove exhibitions critical of Soviet history, which reinforced state-controlled narratives (NEMO, 2025).

Similarly, in China, public access to some historical records is limited since museums are not allowed to portray politically sensitive events such as the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Amnesty International (2024) reports that any enquire of the Tiananmen crackdown in China has been extensively repressed, with authorities basically aiming to wipe it from history. Therefore, according to Krull (n.d), commemorating the Tiananmen Square tragedy is deemed harmful even in Hong Kong, which has generally enjoyed more liberties than mainland China. In 1989, nearly one million people gathered in Tiananmen Square to demand democratic changes. On June 4, 1989, Chinese military opened fire on peaceful protestors, killing hundreds, if not thousands, of people, including children and the elderly (Griffiths, 2019). In the years that followed, authorities even in Hong Kong have progressively restricted commemorations of the incident, mirroring a larger tendency of wiping the massacre from collective memory. However, digital platforms offer a variety of public debate spaces (*WACC | Do*

Social Media Platforms Encourage or Stifle Public Debate?, 2017.). Hence, independent museums are increasingly embracing virtual tours and social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram) to question established historical narratives and participate in grassroots movements.

2.7 Hungary and the Netherlands: Introducing case studies

Diverse research outlines important and critical differences in the ways governance manages culture in Europe. In Hungary museums are used by the governance to get legitimizations and to secure EU funding while reinforcing conservative state narratives (NEMO, 2025). Meanwhile, the Dutch landscape tries to follow a hybrid governance model, balancing state funding with private sector partnerships (Borin, 2015). However, financial instability- such as the 2008 economic crisis- has led to political pressures and funding fluctuations, exposing Dutch museums to market-driven challenges (Can We Talk? Museums Facing Polarization, 2024).

According to Borin (2015), over the last three decades the CCI, in this case museums, has been questioning the role of public administration and the public-private partnerships (PPPs). Therefore, the arise of the PPPs is viewed as modes of financing the cultural sector due to funding cuts. Moreover, PPPs are useful thanks to the integration of corporate sponsorships, philanthropic donations and private sector collaborations, contributing to financial security while introducing new governance complexities (Borin, 2015). As a result, Borin (2015) delves into the main trends of the public-private partnerships sector, explaining the shift from state-dependent funding models to multi-stakeholder governance frameworks, improving the local cultural ecosystems of the broader global and European countries through financial resilience. However, Borin (2015) explains how “Fears of opportunistic behaviors by private partners as well as delegitimization of the public entities have been raised as significant risks in the management of PPPs in the cultural sector “, meaning that despite the positive aspects, PPPs are also perceived as a threat to cultural integrity due to excessive economic logic, so called “Hybridization” of culture and business (Borin, 2015, p.49). Despite this, The Netherlands faces a period of financial instability in 2008, which led to high economic crises and funding cuts. Exposing Dutch museums to political pressures and funding fluctuations (Can We Talk? Museums Facing Polarization, 2024).

Beyond Hungary and the Netherlands, Turkey presents another compelling case of museum politicization that is interesting to mention. According to the Fraktal Research (2020), Turkish citizens express their discomfort regarding the political parties and the higher level of polarisation in the country. NEMO (2024) explains how Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) government is instrumentalising museums in order to aggravate political polarisation. Therefore, the article NEMO (2024), showcase the example of the Hagia Sophia, which was constructed by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I as a cathedral for the Eastern Orthodox Christian world in Turkey; However,

despite its role, the cathedral was converted into a mosque in 1453 CE by Sultan Mehmed II, also symbolising the victory of Islam over Christianity (Ayasofya Camii, n.d.). In 1935, the mosque turned into a museum thanks to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic (Ayasofya Camii, n.d.). By doing so, Atatürk tried to show the separation between state and religion also portraying the peaceful coexistence between different religions and cultures (NEMO,2024).

The Turkish population appreciated this gesture as a symbol of secularism, harmony and growth. Nonetheless all the efforts to get here, in 2020 the Hagia Sophia faced a reconversion into, again, a mosque under President Erdoğan's government (Arik, 2023). This happened under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, who want to reinforce nationalistic and religious narrative while going against Atatürk's secularist policies (Arik, 2023). In contrast, prominent international organizations such as UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2020), ICOM (International Council of Museums, 2020) and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2020) voiced their opposition to this decision, expressing significant concerns over the potential loss of Hagia Sophia's status as a neutral heritage site (ICOM, 2020; ICOMOS, 2020; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2020). According to Alberto Garlandini- ICOM president:

*“ICOM has been advocating for decades the role of museums
as meeting places open to all people without distinction,
a creative space where people can engage with cultural heritage
in all its dimensions, connecting past, present and future.”(International Council of Museums, 2020).*

The following discourse aims to elucidate the ongoing aspirations of ICOM with regard to the role of museums in enriching the cultural landscape and the symbolic gestures they engender. It is the considered opinion of ICOM and ICOMOS that the principles of conservation and accessibility must remain at the core of the management of Hagia Sophia, regardless of its future function and jurisdiction. Emphasizing the need to shape museum governance across different national contexts to safeguard cultural institutions from ideological manipulation.

Chapter 3 Research design and Methodology

3.1 Choice of methodology

This study aims to investigate how political polarization affects the governance of public museums in Hungary and the Netherlands. To answer the main research question, a comparative Qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) is used, addressing political and institutional differences by gathering textual data, such as policy documents and NGO reports that shape cultural policies, as well as museums reports. Considering the comparative nature of this study, both similarities and differences are identified across The Netherlands and Hungary at three interlinked levels, allowing for a thorough examination of governance processes, political stresses, and organizational responses in two ideologically and culturally unique environments:

- National policy focusing on macro-level governance strategies.
- The EU NEMO Barometer providing an international benchmark to analyze national trajectories in the general European context.
- National museum reports, representing micro-level governance practices.

Wodak (2018), the pioneer of the Discourse-Historical Approach, particularly investigates how Critical Discourse Studies employs both micro-level language usage and macro-level political goals and power systems. More specifically, Wodak (2018) examines historical and political texts by reflecting on the way specific concepts are expressed, along with how and why they are expressed, with the intention to incorporate them into the ideology of power structures, tracing ideological turns in cultural governance affecting both the macro and micro levels. The term "micro-level" relates to language use, such as institutional purpose statements or policy rhetoric, with the emphasis on language's role in (re)producing inequality, ideology, and legitimacy in government. On the other hand, the macro-level applies to the wider cultural, political, and institutional contexts that impact how language is developed and experienced (Wodak, 2018).

The goal of this interconnected approach is to offer a holistic "ecosystemic" explanation of cultural governance beneath conditions of political pressure, promoting a symmetrically balanced comparison between both countries. Additionally, a longitudinal perspective is included in the analysis, facilitating the understanding of historical events that shaped the evolution of governance structures and polarization over time.

A total of twelve documents, each following an intentional structure, are analyzed (see Appendix A for further information):

- Four from Hungary
- Five from the Netherlands.
- One European level benchmark (NEMO Barometer)
- One national museum report from the Netherlands
- One national museum report from Hungary

Through these triangulating data, the research sheds light on how governance models operate under polarization and whether national museums in The Netherlands and Hungary maintain autonomy or align with political narratives.

Following Sandelowski's (1995) pragmatic proposal to explore the research issue, the investigation began with an exhaustive understanding of the documents. The emphasis then moved to gathering more data, identifying significant subjects or main storylines, particularly those that highlighted governance difficulties, political alignment, cultural independence, or institutional transformation, and quantifying their educational significance (Sandelowski, 1995).

Additionally, the recommendations made by Altheide (1987) influenced the research analytical method to content analysis. Altheide (1987) emphasized the importance of reflexive participation in data processing, analysis, and interpretation. The relevance of these processes for qualitative textual analysis is emphasized, with the statement that meaning must be dynamically constructed rather than passively extracted. Consequently, the coding process was guided by a critical comprehension each document's authorship, political context, and strategic intentions, illustrating governance patterns as part of wider ideological or institutional narratives (Altheide, 1987).

Consequently, three different interrelated analytical dimensions aim to structure the comparative analysis by guiding the institutional and policy coding reports. Focusing on political narratives, funding and ideological alignment, and institutional leadership. Political narratives delves in the role of museums to support political narratives, meanwhile funding and ideological alignment focuses on how financing decisions reflects ideological alignment. Lastly, institutional leadership relates to the ways institutional leadership is influenced by political decisions.

3.2 Sampling Criteria and Strategy

Twelve tailored reports are analyzed to ensure the collection of both essential and informative data, including official policy studies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as NEMO (Network of European Museum Organisations), and authoritative institutional reports from institutions such as museums. This type of study is defined as a purposive sample method that selects official and policy-relevant materials based on their ability to provide insight into governance practices in public museums. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is driven by the emphasis regarding in

depth understanding, which “leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (Patton, 2002, p.46). Therefore, Patton (2002) suggest that, rather than focusing on gathering standardized information from a large sample, it is more efficient to give importance to a smaller, but carefully selected sample to expand the accuracy and effectiveness of the research (Patton, 2002, p.46). Thus, only publications that expressly address museum governance, cultural policy, and political influence on cultural institutions are assessed to ensure the research's reliability, credibility, as well as analytical value. As a result, the authenticity of each resource is certified by official backing or the inclusion of the institutions' official signatures and stamps.

Furthermore, to maintain contemporary dynamics and trends, only documents generated between 2018 and 2025 are included, reflecting the current situation of the museum industry because of previous and current actions. As consequently, this record contains both pre-existing government institutions and current changes brought on by political polarization. Additionally, while searching for sources, institutional provenance is prioritized: official government policies, EU publications, and assessments by recognized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (such as Freedom house, Transparency International, Culture Monitor, NEMO). Moreover, the comparability of the documents across both countries is also considered meaningful to answer the research question and to enable cross-case analysis (e.g. Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag 2023, Hungarian National Museum- ReAImpaging Public Collections 2024).

Overview of collected sample documents:

Type	Location	Amount	Examples
National Reports	Hungary	4	Inkei & Kristóf(2025), Ligeti et al., (2018), European Commission (2018), Freedom House, 2023
Comparative EU report	Europe	1	NEMO (2025)
National Reports	Netherlands	5	Boekman Foundation (2023), Museumcijfers (2023), Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2025), Nadrous, (2023) - (Boekman Foundation),

			Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer (2024)
National museum report	Hungary	1	Hungarian National Museum- ReAlmaging Public Collections 2024
National museum report	Netherlands	1	Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag 2023

Both micro-level and macro-level perspectives are explored thanks to the choice of documents. As a result, the research permits to assess not only state-driven governance models, yet how museums face political and financial challenges on their own. Moreover, the sample size is deemed adequate due to the balance of scenarios. Hungary and the Netherlands get comparable attention; although Hungary lacks a sectoral data report akin to the Netherlands' "Museumcijfers(2023)"; these deficiencies were acknowledged as weaknesses but did not jeopardise the overall comparison framework. As a result of the reports' length, each document has a high degree of detail, ranging from eight (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024) to two hundred seventeen nine (Nadrous, 2023) pages. Finally, the sample's quality is observed through conceptual saturation, which allows for the identification of repeating patterns and governance practices across cases.

The sampling achieves a conceptual saturation thanks to the highlight of national versus sectoral documents as well as recent versus longitudinally relevant, which focuses on analyzing and reflecting on changes in governance and legislation over a longer period, rather than simply focusing on one specific year. Lastly, all selected reports focus on both explicit policy framework and implicit ideological narratives, highlighting the nuanced and multifaceted analysis.

3.3 Operationalizing Key Variables

In order to conduct empirical analysis, the key theoretical concepts used in this research must be translated into observable indicators. These concepts are four, including political polarization, institutional autonomy, museums governance, and Public Value and Engagement. This process allows for a systematic comparison of governance trends and political influence in museums across Hungary and the Netherlands. The following table provides a summary of the conceptual definitions and the empirical indicators that were used to collect and code the data.

As a result, key concepts of the study are operationalized for empirical analysis as follows:

Concept	Definition	Measurement (Breakdown + Indicators)
Political Polarization	The degree of ideological and affective division in society or among political actors, especially around culture and governance.	Media framing, policy rhetoric, public opinion reports
Institutional autonomy	The degree to which it is independent of political influence.	Legal frameworks, board structures and incidents of censorship.
Museum Governance	Structures overseeing leadership, funding and autonomy.	Appointment procedures, funding models and oversight mechanisms.
Public Value and Engagement	The potential of museums to contribute to democratic, educational and inclusive goals.	Diversity in participation and programming, as well as efforts to make programming accessible.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collecting process is directed by theme relevance, resulting in a thematic analysis of museum governance under political polarisation. This comparative, ecosystematic investigation of museum governance in Hungary and the Netherlands aided the research goal. As a result, by defining three levels of governance to analyze, such as national policy, European sectoral benchmarks, and museum institutional practices, the process allows the research to collect sufficient data to answer both the main research question and the sub-questions. In addition, documents and reports from both countries are selected to best illustrate the analysis and these three interrelated levels, with an emphasis on a triangulated view of governance under political polarization practices.

1. Therefore, a total of 60 codes were initially discovered thanks to an inductive coding process applied during the content and comparative analysis of the primary documents including: policy papers, national documents, cultural strategy reports, NEMO barometer, as well as museums annual

reports. According to Charmaz (2006), codes were generated through the identification of recurring patterns within the research, using grounded theory approach. However, overlapping or identical codes exist, therefore combining them for thematic clarity aided in reducing the research, yielding 51 revised codes. The development of themes, precisely seven final inductively themes, was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, which allows for flexibility and depth in qualitative categorization. Consequently, in the publication entitled *Thematic Analysis in Psychology: In the field of psychology, the technique of identifying meaningful patterns within data related to the primary research question is explained in Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2006, p. 78), by Braun and Clarke (2006). Moreover, Wodak's (2018) helped organizing themes into macro, micro and meso levels of analysis through his discourse-historical approach model. Giving major deepness into the topic of analysis, therefore Wodak (2001, para.1) describes the discourse-historical approach as "attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive 'events' are embedded". Additionally, a final number of seven themes was selected for their ability to capture the main topics of research, including ideological, structural, and institutional governance in museums, providing a robust structure for analyzing the topic of research. The themes were especially designed based on the four key concepts operationalized in the section "3.3 Operationalizing Key Variables", in which the themes "Polarization and Societal Division" as well as "Civic Space and Participation" reflect the key concept of Political Polarization explained in the table. Moreover, "Governance Structures and Autonomy" and "Transparency and Institutional Integrity", align perfectly with the Institutional Autonomy part, in which the focus on internal balances and independence from political pressure is explained. Thus, "Funding Logic and Financial Pressure", plus, "Politicization of Museums – Programming and Leadership", perfectly represent the concept of Museum Governance. Particularly, since the focus is about how political dynamics affect leadership, funding models, and curatorial choices. Finally, the last theme "Historical and Ethical Positioning" relates the category of Public Value and Engagement, especially because museums are used to foster civic reflection and contests historical narratives.

In order to facilitate the visualization of the seven themes employed for the analysis of the topic, a representation of it is included:

- 1) Polarization and Societal Division
- 2) Governance Structures and Autonomy
- 3) Civic Space and Participation
- 4) Funding Logic and Financial Pressure
- 5) Politicization of Museums - Programming and Leadership
- 6) Historical and Ethical Positioning
- 7) Transparency and Institutional Integrity

Data gathering is guided by two distinct principles, such as: the necessity to offer relevance to institutional governance and political impact on museums, as well as the goal of achieving a high level of comparability between nation examples. As a result, materials that enable meaningful comparison between the Hungarian and Dutch contexts were selected, with specific focus on current trends and policy frameworks.

For instance, the NEMO (2025) is intended to investigate the impacts of politics on museums at the European level, excluding country-by-country research analysis, but rather providing a straightforward explanation of European concerns about political pressure on museums.

Focusing on the National level, both The Netherlands and Hungary are represented through official cultural policy reports as well as general policy documents issued by state institutions. Including policy related reports from Hungary such as the Inkei & Kristóf(2025), the Ligeti et al.,(2018), the Freedom House (2023) and the European Commission (2018). The Inkei & Kristóf(2025) is a policy report chosen for its explicit reflection on how culture is view as a political project for the government (Compendium, 2025). Giving insights regarding the level of polarisation affecting the cultural sector, by showing how museums are used as national-political narratives. Complementing this, the Ligeti et al., (2018) is more specifically a civil society report, which exemplifies how corruption is emebdded in the Hungarian political sectrum, using public insitutions to serve private and political actors rather than the general public interest. Connected to the Freedom House (2023), which focuses on exposing the strategical use of cultural instiutitions to promote ideological narratives, eroding transparency and autonomy in museums (Ligeti et al., 2018; Freedom House, 2023). Lastly the European Commission (2018) , mentions hungary as one of the countries with major corruption in whole Europe, lacking transparency in their actions.

Conversely, the Netherlands has chosen the following national-level reports: the Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer (2024) and the Boekman Foundation(2023), both of which emphasise on the idea of arm's-length governance. These texts highlight major aspects of how the Dutch government regards culture, emphasising its autonomy and support since culture is regarded as crucial to democratic discourse, with museums serving as essential public institutions. Furthermore, efficient funding requirements to support museums and the arts are discussed. The further papers gathered to supplement the study analysis are Museumcijfers (2023), Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2025), and the Nadrous (2023), which provide extensive sectoral statistics, financial breakdowns, and wide institutional overviews by diving deeper into the museum theme. Explaining how museums in the Netherlands employ culture to promote open conversation on controversial topics and strengthen international relations (Museumcijfers, 2023). Unfortunately, these materials are not available for the Hungarian scenario. This causes an imbalance in direct statistical comparisons, which is recognized

as a limitation. However, the purposeful alignment of documents, such as state-issued cultural policies, NGO criticisms, and sectoral statistics, allows for extensive comparative research.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes on the most prominent national museums in both countries, reviewing their annual and conference reports. The selected museums are the Rijksmuseum (Netherlands) and the Hungarian National Museum. Both are chosen for the same reason: they each play significant parts in defining national identity as well as historical consciousness in the nations they represent, making them ideal case studies for studying how political dynamics influence institutional missions and governance systems.

According to CORDIS (2013), national museums are important because they symbolise political countries and European identities, showcase art, while bringing communities and citizens together. As a result, CORDIS (2013), stated that “National museums employ narrative perspectives in terms of internationalism, the nation, and ideology. They help to set up a long-term consensus on the cultural underpinning of political community. They also narrate reconciliation and can contribute to the handling of conflicts” (CORDIS, 2013.). Highlighting focusses on museums primarily for their culture and arts, but additionally for investigating movements in political influence and governance, analysing the disparities between cultural policy and political presence in various parts of Europe.

As previously stated, the lack of parallelism with some reports between Hungary and the Netherlands is considered as a weakness that is handled in the analytical framework. However, unique data is collected and processed, allowing for a useful cross-national comparison. Furthermore, the research provides readers with additional information about the production of governance narratives in two distinct European nations, as well as varied national museum organisations, allowing for a more in-depth thematic content analysis.

3.5 Operationalization

This research examines theoretical themes related to museum governance, political polarisation, and pressure. These concepts are located in twelve separate policy papers and implemented into codes adopting a bottom-up coding approach based on a discourse content analysis framework.

Furthermore, the purpose of the operationalisation is to locate citations that embody the topic of analysis, in order to generate categories, so-called sub-themes, of codes to further incorporate into bigger themes. As a result, fifty- five codes are added to fourteen sub-themes before being combined into seven main themes. These themes arose from examination of documents at the national, European, and institutional levels, highlighting governance conflicts, political narratives, and institutional shifts.

Firstly, Polarization and Societal Division grasp the ideology of how pressure formed by governance, as well as polarisation, risks to create division in society by fragmenting citizens' connection. Connected to Wodak's (2018), who explains how politicians use "Topoi" argumentation schemes to justify political decisions through legitimization strategies, showing how, by introducing this, governance is able to create societal exclusion and pressure in society. Thus, the theme Governance Structures and autonomy explains policy approaches such as arm's length, which are used in the Netherlands, as well as other models of governance, and cultural financing, which is used to avoid direct governmental control over culture. Related to Duignan's (2023) study, which discusses how leadership jobs in public organisations, including museums, are often filled out of political allegiance rather than professional expertise. This practice is especially common in Hungary, where museum leadership is mostly formed by politics, as opposed to the Dutch arm's length approach of governance in cultural domains. Furthermore, Shelley & Krippendorff (1984) discusses content analysis, describing how textual expressions support or oppose institutional norms. Additionally, the notion of Civic Space and Participation is intriguing since it relates to stakeholder viewpoints. As a result, in the Netherlands, the subject highlights the engagement of many individuals in the cultural sectors who are aiming to make excellent judgements in the field while seeking feedback from numerous stakeholders (Nadrous, 2023). Illustrating how the state works differently in Hungary, which puts pressure on museums institutions to prioritise distinct objectives based on partisanship, such as national pride, language training, and government-defined inclusion in Hungary (ReAImparting Public Collections 2024). Consequently, Funding Logic and Financial Pressure portrays neoliberal governance where fundings are used to control museums, therefore Duignan (2023) explains that public funding are used mainly to strategically reward ideological alignment, directly related to the Hungarian government which restricts museum funding to those aligned with state narratives. Politicization of museums, including thematics such as programming and leadership, demonstrates whether museums operate as political venues aligning with Wodak's (2018) idea of institutions that generate national identity narratives. Museums, libraries, and universities are incorporated into public interest foundations, and structural transformations are changing the function of cultural institutions from political or loyalist control (Inkei & Kristóf, 2025). Moreover, the theme analyzes loyalty-based leadership, mentioning how culture is seen as a political project for Orbán's governance in Hungary (Inkei & Kristóf, 2025). As a result, Duignan (2023) claims that institutional monitoring becomes politicized through selective appointments and loyalty-driven management. Meanwhile, Historical and Ethical Positioning focusses on democracy and historical memory, using cultural diplomacy to criticize historical periods such as colonial injustices, emphasizing the museum's position in global discourse. According to Nadrous (2023), ethical governance standards are associated with postcolonial restitution and democratic ethics. Finally, Transparency and Institutional Integrity relies directly on the European Semester Report (2018), which criticized Hungary's corruption and disengagement from EU accountability. As an outcome, Hungarian museums are unable to count on museum transparency.

3.6 Analysis

According to Krippendorff (2018), journalists and communication scholars began using content analysis around 1970. However, it was time consuming and labour intensive, thus its scope shifted over time. Researchers began employing this approach to investigate political influences and developing ideas, as well as to understand how institutions establish themselves through the texts they generate (Krippendorff, 2018, p.8).

As a result, to address the research topic, a comparative content analysis is used, with an emphasis on identifying the similarities and contrasts between policy and museum reports, reflecting on political influences on museums. More specifically, the comparative aspect focuses on understanding whether the Netherlands and Hungary faces similar pressures in the museums sector. As mentioned in Krippendorff (2018), the Webster's dictionary of the English language defines content analysis as "analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect" (Krippendorff, 2018, p.10). Additionally, content analysis does not adhere to a single type of analysis; rather, it develops its own methodology, allowing researchers to uncover and critically analyse the analysis, regardless of the outcomes (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 10).

However, this study uses a discourse historical approach as well, creating a twofold interpretative strategy. As stated *Discourse and European Integration* written by Wodak (2018), text must be contextualised in order to gather a deeper meaning. Carta & Wodak (2015) explains how discourse analysis serves to shed light on how social discourses shape foreign policy by means of debate and communication. Thus, this methodology connects linguistic concepts to macro-political structures. Therefore, "national unity" or "preservation of values" terms, founded in Hungarian reports, are evaluated based to their tactical discursive purpose in strengthening ideological authority. Meanwhile, reports regarding the The Netherlands emphasized terms such as "inclusivity", "transparency", and "arm's-length", illustrating an approach of participatory democracy.

Furthermore, patterns among national and museum-level papers are discovered using the coding tree developed during operationalisation. As a consequence, an examination of the reports is conducted to identify common themes and structural indications concerning political influence, museum ideals, autonomy of museum programming, and governance. Moreover, codes are selected based on important quotes which reflect the topic of research, focusing on semantic density and discursive context. To understand the relation between text and quotes, a quote description meaning is added in the coding tree. It is important to notice that codes are chosen following an inductive approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a multi-stage coding and categorisation procedure is applied

when inductive approach is selected, following an identification of cases based on category development through data before being applied to the major categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Shelley & Krippendorff(1984)'s interpretation regarding the function of texts to produce or resist institutional realities guides the scope of the analysis. Moreover, Duignan's (2023) concept concerning political appointments as well as intellectual leadership influences the investigation. Both techniques shed light on the way language communicates institutional purpose alongside structural oversight mechanisms.

Furthermore, the next chapter evaluates the coded data element of the key themes, allowing comparison and correlations between reports and quotes, which compose the findings section.

Chapter 4 Results

This chapter delves into what emerged from the investigation of primary policy and institutional reports across Hungary and the Netherlands utilizing a comparative content and discourse analysis. Based on the seven, already stated, themes, the results showcase the key aspects of how polarization effects the administration of national museums, as defined through language, institutional rules, and governance narratives at various policy stages across the Netherlands and Hungary.

A comparative lens reveals recurring patterns and key differences between the two countries. In the Hungarian context, the cultural sphere is subject to a greater degree of centralization in terms of political control, a phenomenon that is often reflected in the realm of curatorial decisions and leadership appointments. By contrast, Dutch museums tend to exhibit a higher degree of institutional independence and participatory governance.

Across the themes, the analysis identifies moments of convergence and divergence in how each country approaches transparency, civic participation, and the ideological positioning of museums. As a result, this chapter, for each theme, compares the cases of Hungary and the Netherlands in the museum sector. The following sections summarize the key patterns observed as well as mentioned direct quotes from primary sources and brief references to literature in order to support the findings.

Theme 1: Polarization & Societal Division

Polarization and societal division theme involves codes such as "state capture", "politicization of culture", "polarization", and "centralization of governance", exploring significant political and ideological concerns concerning national museums in Hungary and the Netherlands, particularly due to terms such as social cohesiveness, belonging, and a national identity. Moreover, a persistent erosion of institutional independence is prevalent in the texts.

1.1 Hungary

When analyzing the issue, Hungarian cultural division is clear; hence, the Inkei & Kristóf(2025) specifically describes museums as "role of culture in strengthening national identity"(p.12). Moreover, the Inkei & Kristóf(2025) explains how centralization of public cultural institutions has led to the merger of the Museum of Applied Arts, National Museum, National Széchényi Library, Petőfi Literary Museum, Museum of Trade and Hospitality, and Museum of Natural History into the Hungarian National Museum Public Collection Centre. There was also a plan to consolidate local cultural

institutions (theatre, library, and museum). According to this hypothetical scenario, local organizations would have been merged into a national umbrella entity (National Theatre, National Museum) with administrative and financial oversight. Demonstrating the use of museums for ideological purposes, rather than cultural ones. Culture is incorporated into governmental apparatuses, where it is viewed as a source of economic benefit while restricting resistance and changing public memory, hence reinforcing Duignan's (2023) research that polarized regimes subordinate public institutions to preserve ideological dominance.

Moreover, Freedom House (2023) mentions “Hungary’s ongoing autocratization, which drove an annual decline second only to Russia’s, and Poland’s updated illiberal agenda continued to challenge democratic standards in Europe”, showcasing how gradual transformation of institutions has become a feature of Hungarian governance. This quote is, therefore coded, with the term “state capture”. Related to David-Barret (2024), who, in his article *State Capture: How democracy can be systematically corrupted*, explains the term of state capture and the abuse by political leaders, highlighting how cultural policy in Hungary is a central part of Orban’s control strategy. More specifically, state capture is able to influence formation of public policy itself, skewing laws and systems to benefit narrow interests. State Capture is based on three pillars, such as Influence policy formation (rewriting laws), Control implementation (appoint loyalists), Disable oversight (weaken media, judiciary, civil society). As a result, state capture originated in post-communist nations, but it today encompasses politics-led versions in which elected officials violate legal and institutional frameworks to seize control of state operations for political and personal benefit (David-Barret, 2024). Moreover, David-Barret (2024) highlights the function of Hungary as an archetypal case in which democratic institutions have been weakened. Therefore, Orban used legal restructuring and control over public appointment to centralise power and dismantle accountability: “[...]The scale of the changes on which his government embarked, centralising and consolidating the government’s power and weakening checks on his power, violated a host of democratic norms.”(David-Barret, 2024, p.17). As a consequence, Orban's party, Fidesz, has reconstructed cultural institutions (including museums and the media) into ideological tools, framing resistance via populist and nationalist vocabulary (David-Barret, 2024).

1.2 Netherlands

When looking at Dutch cultural reports, a different logic seems to be at play. For instance, the Nadrous (2023), supports museum projects that aim to represent the country’s cultural diversity in a broad and balanced way. These kinds of efforts clearly speak to pluralistic values, but they’re not usually talked about in the context of political polarization. This absence supports the conclusion that,

based on the specific indicators used in this study, there is little evidence of polarization in the Netherlands.

The tone and language used in Dutch reports align with Wodak's (2018) view that inclusive governance can act as a safeguard against polarization and civic fragmentation. In contrast, the analysis of Hungarian material shows clear signs of both discursive and institutional polarization.

This contrast points to something deeper, it's not just about how things are talked about, but about how institutions themselves are shaped. In Hungary, polarization shows up both in the way issues are framed and in how cultural governance is structured, while in the Netherlands, that dynamic seems largely absent. These differences say a lot about how each country builds and maintains its cultural policies, which is something I'll unpack more in the next section.

Theme 2: Governance Structures and Autonomy

This topic focuses on the diverse governance structures of both the Netherlands and Hungary, analyzing how, due to them, museums are organized differently. Therefore, this theme touches topics such as arm's length government, cultural funding models, policy cycle structures and governance accountability. These codes serve to evaluate whether museums' structural placement is meant to maintain independence or allow for political control.

2.1 Netherlands

In the Netherlands museums have full autonomy on programming and administrations, therefore Boekman Foundation (2023) mentions some of their objectives in which "The state should distance itself from judgements regarding the value of specific expressions of art.", showcasing an arm's length government. More precisely, it is necessary to consider the definition of an arm's length government. The governance model includes arm's length governance, which works independently of the main central government. According to Devine and Devine (2015), the company may be more free and take more risks since it is free of the government's predetermined processes and bureaucracy. The formation of such entities reflects trends that began in the 1980s, particularly under New Public Management (NPM) philosophies, which sought to reduce government size while improving the quality of public services through structural disaggregation of government functions (Thiel & Smullen, 2021;

Overman & Van Thiel, 2015). Moreover, Boekman Foundation(2023) explains the topic of the cultural funding paradigm, specifically how the state funding mechanism are organized to prevent direct political influence. Additionally, the ministry of culture, science and education fo the Netherlands is required to present a policy declaration once every four years in order to strengthen transparent and recurrent governance reviews in the nation (Boekman Foundation, 2023, p.3). The Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer(2024) describes policies that preserve cultural autonomy through indirect public funding. Mentioning the five Criteria that are being used to allocate government funding for the arts, showing the governance logic behind public funding that shapes who receives institutional support, with artistic and/or substantive quality and social significance at firsts. Moreover, supervisors working on roles such as the BIS-funded indistitutions are not meant to be honorary titles, but rather the governmeent expects them to be public fiduciary duties, reinforcing the govenrance integrity and transparency, particularly in museums. Hence the supervisors are “primarily responsible for the proper spending of public money.” (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024, p.6). Connected to Shelley & Krippendorff (1984) , who believes that institutions are semantic machines that regulate public opinion by distributing meanings. Nonetheless, Shelley & Krippendorff(1984) explains how independence is defined not by the acquisition of public funding, but rather by the ability to define and communicate the institution's mission; thus, autonomy can be compromised if external forces have power over the mission. As a result, the Dutch model, which promotes arm's length governance, is consistent with Shelley & Krippendorff(1984)'s perspective of institutional autonomy as a reflection of democratic government.

2.2 Hungary

On the other hand, Hungary provides centralized government with minimal flexibility for cultural institutions. The Inkei & Kristóf(2025) specifies that “cultural policy under the Orbán governments represent the ‘cultural diffusion’ model, which focuses on the role of culture in strengthening national identity.”, shedding light into the governance models where cultural polarization is present due to Orban’s government (p.5). Therefore, museums in Hungary are governed and controlled by state ministries. Thus, implementation processes such as appointment of politically aligned museum directors reflect top-down governance, contradicting arm’s-length ideals.

Connected to David-Barrett’s(2024) idea that in countries such as Hungary, the govenernment manly transforms institutions (e.g museums) as services for the political party, rather than for public goods. This process, so-called state capture, is a legal, administrative model that has been used to dominate and repurpose public insitutions for ideological and electoral advantages. Therefore, museums are instrumentalized and politicized to serve nationalistic narratives in Hungary, where the cultural sector is considered as a tool for propaganda (David-Barrett, 2024).

Finally, the Netherlands uses an arm's length model to maintain cultural independence. Meanwhile, Hungary is based on state control approaches which incorporates cultural governance into ideological narratives. These opposite methods are used to demonstrate how governance structures reinforce political polarization in public organizations.

Theme 3: Civic Space and Participation

According to the assessment of the reports, the patterns presenting this topic are extremely current. The subject is mostly on understanding participatory civic spaces in Hungary and the Netherlands. Sub-themes include "participatory policymaking," "civil society repression," and "institutional landscape.". Before delving into the issue, one concern has been raised: do cultural governance models encourage public participation and civic discussion, or do they confine interaction to state-controlled narratives?

3.1 Hungary

Firstly, in Hungary the pattern of erosion of civil society is present, more specifically the report Inkei & Kristóf(2025) explains: "To counter attacks on national sovereignty", the government established the Office for the Defence of Sovereignty in early 2024. The office cannot yet apply legal sanctions, but it writes reports against international human rights, anti-corruption, democracy NGOs.", showcasing the reduction of space for NGOs, watchdogs or dissenting cultural actors (p.2.2)

3.2 Netherlands

Meanwhile, the Netherlands is more aware of this topic, showcasing a higher number of reports compared to Hungary. For instance, there has been a reorganization to decentralize and improve the balance across national and local levels, in which "all Dutch citizens have equal access to cultural activities" (Boekman Foundation, 2023, p.8). Moreover, the Nadrous (2023), describe inclusive planning processes in which cultural institutions consult with advisory councils and community stakeholders and discuss about who gets to define what heritage is. The Nadrous (2023) describes how stakeholders, such as the Boekman Foundation's researchers, collaborate to make the best decisions for the museum sector, expressing viewpoints with stakeholders and industry professionals who provide the Nadrous (2023) culture monitor with essential as well as thoroughly information and expertise. Related to Wodak's (2018), who explicitly states that stakeholder participation generates legitimacy. As a result, the Boekman Foundation is represented in Wodak's (2018) perspective on the significance of openness and stakeholder collaboration in cultural organizations' decision-making processes. Krzyżanowski et al., (2023) emphasizes the need for stakeholders to be involved in both content and

procedure, ensuring transparency in decision-making. establishing a relationship to museums in the Netherlands that are not just curated for the public, but partly by the public through policy design and operational strategy in participatory governance.

Thanks to this analysis, it is possible to note the contrast between both countries. Hungarian museum policies are highly restricted, where individuals are not able to give public opinions regarding the subject matter. Reflecting the state capture regimes, explained by David-Barrett's(2024), in which opinions are not favored to prevent opposition in society. On the other hand, the Netherlands civic engagement is different since it is structurally embedded and actively maintained. Demonstrating how civic space and participation in cultural governance are not neutral features, but mainly reflections of political will and ideological tolerance.

Theme 4: Funding Logic and Financial Pressure

This theme focuses on the ways financial systems as well as funding logics work in the national museums sector, touching points regarding financial dependency, politicization of fundings as well as museums funding structure and funding for digitization of museums. Focusing on understanding the dependency of museums on funding and how fundings enable museums reinforcing institutional autonomy or increase vulnerability.

4.1 Netherlands

The Dutch government provides financial support to museums in the Netherlands through a variety of mechanisms. In addition to the provision of general funding, the government also offers competitive grants to museums on a project basis. For instance, the statistical report *Museumcijfers* (2023) provides a comprehensive overview of the percentage of income and financial support allocated to museums in 2022. The report showcases how 49% of income is derived from self-generated revenue, with the remaining 51% being supported by government subsidies. Additionally, it demonstrates how, given the system's effective organisation, which achieves a balance between long-term state support and incentives for innovation and inclusivity, museums are able to invest their funds towards digitisation (*Museumcijfers*, 2023). Therefore, as indicated by *Museumcijfers* (2023), it is important to emphasise the priority of Dutch museums in financing digitisation through the utilisation of primarily internal funds. Hence, the hypothesis that there is an absence of external support is perceived, although this is not explicitly stated as a challenge in any of the reports. However it could be studied by other researchers. Connected to Devine and Devine's (2015) identification of "good practice" in government-funded cultural bodies, shedding light on financial transparency regarding the way fundings and own museums incomes are used, as well as equitable allocation process and limited political interference.

However, the Dutch governmental system is also facing some tensions, compromising the cultural system. It is possible to see this through the government policy letter on (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024). Although the Netherlands has good basis structure, the system is undergoing some pressure. Precisely, the report signals that, even though the Netherlands has a strong system for managing culture, including clear funding guidelines, artist remuneration policies, and accountability frameworks, the system is under pressure. However the main issue is not about politics interfering, but rather about limited financial resources, increased expectations from society and institutional pressure to remain flexible in a reality which faces higher economic constraints. Therefore, these present issues can indirectly influence public museums and their structure, by restricting their programmatic freedom and making it harder to choose to be flexible. Therefore, the Dutch government letter, translated from Dutch to English, states: “Our country has a large number of initiatives, all adding something to the cultural offer in their own way. But the culture budget requires making choices. This letter provides insight into the result for the coming period. With the grants and subsidies from the national cultural funds in 2025 - 2028, we support a high quality cultural offer, which is accessible and spread across the country. I also see the bottlenecks in this system. This is also pointed out by institutions and sector representatives. The opinions of the Council for Culture Access to Culture¹⁴ and of the UNESCO Commission On (ver)vangbaar¹⁵ offer important insights into what is going well and what could be improved. I want to use the coming period to look for ways to improve and simplify the system within the available resources. In this way, we can increase the contribution of the cultural and creative sector to society and strengthen it where necessary.” (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024, p.8).

4.2 Hungary

Contrastingly, while analysing the Hungarian fundings landscape, it is possible to notice how they are allocated as loyalty source, specifically they are based on political loyalty rather than cultural merit, portraying a centralized and politically influenced funding structure compared to the Dutch landscape: “Unlike the National Cultural Fund, Petőfi Cultural Agency distributes public grant money directly, without professional boards of trustees.” (Compendium Cultural Policy Profile, 2025, p.1.3). Nevertheless, the NEMO (2025) provides a comprehensive analysis of the influence of politics in museums, particularly in regards to the aspect of how government fundings are usually influenced by political, as well as ideological criteria. Hence, it is interesting to note the scale analyzed by the NEMO (2025), in which more than seven out of ten respondents working in the museum (or similar organizations) sector explain how budget is mostly based on political considerations and governmental decisions. Furthermore, in a survey of ten representatives employed within the national museums sector, this specific area was identified by nine of them (NEMO, 2025). As a result, when contextualized with

the Hungarian case, this analysis demonstrates how financial governance has the capacity to serve both democratic resilience and political consolidation.

Lastly, this theme showcases the importance, use and challenges of fundings in the museum sector, highlighting the powerful governance mechanism they are. Therefore, in the Dutch landscape fundings promote cultural diversity and help fostering museums digitization and programming. However, the country is now facing difficulties in terms of financial strains. Meanwhile, the Hungarian government uses fundings as a way to increase political alignment, supporting ideological programming to reinforce cultural self-censorship, also highlighted by David-Barrett (2024) while analyzing state capture systems. Moreover, the NEMO Barometer(2025) highlights the broader influence of politics in museums that can be related to the way fundings are used.

Theme 5: Politicization of Museums - Programming and Leadership

This theme focuses on the ways museums can be used as cultural instruments as well as a way to instrumentalized both their public programming and internal leadership structures, focusing on the intersection of content control and political appointments. Including sub-themes such as framing and ideological use of museums, as well as Political appointments and loyalty enforcement. Shedding light on how museums are administrated in politically polarized environments, understanding differences between two countries with different levels of polarization.

5.1 Hungary

Firstly, Hungarian reports explain that museums are essential in order to shape national consciousness. Explaining how “Critics refer to this process as the “deculturalization” of the Castle.”, referring to museums used for national, as well as political reasons(Compendium Cultural Policy Profile, 2025, p. 2.1). Additionally, the Inkei & Kristóf(2025), also highlights the issue regarding the lack of autonomy in Orbán’s governance, perceiving culture only as a source of project used for political purposes. Explaining how culture is not perceived as a distinctive sphere separated from politics, but actually is seen as a source of function of cultural policy that works to create and maintain political community (Compendium Cultural Policy Profile, 2025, p.1.1). The Freedom House (2023) deepens this perspective by showing how museum exhibitions increasingly align with the government's interpretation of history. Examining how institutions are used to promote political ideologies, often undermining neutrality, explaining how also sources of media are under pressure since they have been

bought by the governments, therefore controlling what is exposed on television. Similar to the NEMO (2025), which examines how museums reflect external pressure on exhibits, programming, and narratives. Consequently, NEMO (2025) indicates: "Almost 6 out of 10 museums responded that they feel that their museum's vision or (parts of its) programme is subject to political pressure" (p.4). Highlight the processes that museums are going through.

5.2 Netherlands

On the other hand, Dutch governance reports, such as the Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer (2024) and the Nadroux (2023), delve into topics such as arm's length models, fair code principles, participatory planning and inclusivity. For instance, Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer (2024), links ethics to financial support. Precisely referring to mandatory compliance with sector-wide labor and standard wages in order to link institutional funding to labour governance. This is called fair practice code, in which fair pay funds are accompanied by the duty to pay fairly in the cultural sector. Moreover, another great example of the differences between these two countries is shown in the annual report from the Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag (2023), in which it is explained how the museum is focused on portraying international cultural diplomacy through exhibitions which challenge historical injustices. By doing so, the Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag (2023) demonstrates museum's autonomous role in global conversations, using sensitive topics, such as slavery, colonial injustices at an international level. Also showing how the museum is able to choose independently their exhibitions even if the topics could be politically controversial, portraying the idea of the arm's length governance model of museums institutions in the Netherlands (Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag, 2023). The Rijksmuseum promotes decolonial narratives, allowing visitors to explore multiple perspectives on history. This aligns with Krzyżanowski's et al., (2023) model of discursive governance, which emphasizes openness and inclusion in constructing institutional legitimacy.

This contrast illustrates how politicization can shape both who governs cultural institutions and how they define national narratives. In Hungary, political appointments and ideological programming work in tandem to promote unity under an illiberal agenda. Hence loyal director must align the museum's exhibitions with government view points. In the Netherlands, institutional safeguards preserve museum autonomy, enabling cultural diversity and critical reflection.

This theme is used to highlight how power over governance also signifies power over narrative in certain governance models, therefore museums are explicitly perceived as tool of regime legitimization.

Theme 6: Historical & Ethical Positioning

A defining characteristic of this theme is not only what is said in institutional discourse, but also what is left unsaid. The theme *Historical and Ethical Positioning* is connected to the past one Politicization of museums, however it focuses more on how museums confront, avoid, behave controversial historical issues, such as nationalism, WWII, ethical restitutions and colonialism. Therefore, the topic aims to understand the ways institutions reflect on the past or rather promote a different version of how history gets told. However, by digging deeper into the reports, it is observable that the Hungarian cultural policy landscape, in which the absence of controversial historical narratives is present. Precisely, the country's role in World War II, treatment of Jewish and Roma populations, or complicity in authoritarian regimes is not present, signifying a silence that serves as historical erasure in order to have control over the narrative of historical facts.

6.1 Hungary

When analyzing the report the *Inkei & Kristóf*(2025), is interesting to notice how there is no critical engagement with Hungary's 20th-century history in relation to minorities. The document is very focused on acknowledging Hungarian heritage preservation and culture such as cultural sectors, legislation on culture, cultural participation and consumption, as well as other cultural levels. However, the lack of historical accountability is missed, giving a sense of lack. According to Dieckmann et al. (2021), omitting certain parts can be a powerful way suppressing democratic development by encouraging narrow historical stories that discourage reflection and pluralism.

For instance, the quote "Frequent ad hoc interventions significantly alter final balances from initial annual budgets." explains the continuously changing nature of cultural institutions, such as museums, in Hungary. Highlighting the idea of how governance of cultural institutions lacks accountability, demonstrating difficulties in making critical programming happening. Therefore, preventing museums making long-term expositions that could tackle historical and critical scenario better. (p.7.1.2)

Furthermore, The Freedom House (2023), explains "The EU should continue efforts to condition financial assistance to these countries on their compliance with European standards for the rule of law and human rights. For example, it should remain committed to Article 7 proceedings, which aim to punish member states that violate the common values of the EU by suspending certain rights guaranteed by the Treaty on the European Union" (p.22). Portraying the tensions between EU legal frameworks and national governance models. According to Dieckmann et al. (2021), control over historical stories can be well used in order to suppress democratic reform, enforcing ideological unity.

6.2 Netherlands

On the other hand, the Netherlands focuses on creating bilateral relations with other countries through cultural projects, improving the relationship with other countries as well as reputations in places with whom the Netherlands has a complex relationship (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2025). Therefore, The Netherlands focuses on bringing back cultural heritage as a way to make peace after colonial time, stating that the cooperation with museums, as well as the restitution of arts and artefacts is enabling the improvement with bilateral relations (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2025). Also focusing on promoting freedom of expression, by protecting and promoting artistic voices, especially when they are under threat. Using culture to encourage international dialogue, explain how “Culture makes it possible to discuss difficult issues and contributes to international cooperation.” (Museumcijfers, 2023, p.3). Hence, Dutch museums frame cultural institutions as essential to democratic discourse and participation, encoring museums as civic instrument in the political discourse. Thanks to this, Dutch museums enables a strong link between cultural policy with social policy (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024).

This theme is important since it helps exploring how these two European countries explores museum programming through cultural governance. Hungary does not focuses on long-term plans, omitting historical narratives in their programming. Meanwhile, the Netherlands is engaged in a process of introspection and historical exploration with a view to fostering new connections with countries with which it has experienced difficulties. This comparison illustrates how museum policies and government attitudes affect whether museums are places for learning or places where memories are forgotten. Moreover, Simply Psychology (2023) social identity theory further explains how museums contribute to social cohesion, belonging, and identity formation particularly when they are perceived as neutral spaces of historical narrative.

This worldwide example reinforces the framework's validity outside the basic case studies, particularly concerning the use of museums as political instruments and the degradation of institutional neutrality.

Theme 7: Transparency and Institutional Integrity

This theme explores the relationship between transparency, accountability, and ethical standards in cultural governance, and their impact on the autonomy and trustworthiness of national museums. Therefore, it provides information on lack of transparency, institutional corruption and

misuse of funds, as well as governance gaps. Showcasing how the government is able to reflect democratic standards of openness, or in opposition deviate from them.

7.1 Hungary

According to the *European Commission (2018)*, “Corruption remains a major concern. The perception of corruption in Hungary is higher than in the EU overall.”, portraying a corrupted reality in which high perceived and actual corruption are considered embedded in the governance systems (p.33). Therefore, corruption can negatively affect the country’s overall economy. Moreover, the *European Commission (2018)*, explains how the anti-corruption system has multiple gaps, explaining how Concerns regarding prevention of corruption with respect to members of parliament, judges and prosecutors have not been sufficiently addressed yet (p. 34). Consequently, the government's strategy to combat corruption remains predominantly focused on enhancing integrity within the public administration sector. There is an absence of compelling evidence to support the efficacy of measures designed to prevent corruption, resulting into political favouritism tool to administrate fundings decisions rather than meritocratic or public interests processes (European Semester Country Report, 2018).

Consequently, the *Inkei & Kristóf(2025)*, does not mention that Hungarian cultural museums institutions ensure transparency or are subject to public review. Reinforcing the idea of “withdrawal from transparency mechanisms” mentioned above, reflecting on the absence of mechanisms like independent audits, stakeholder review panels, or parliamentary scrutiny in the Hungarian landscape. Related to David-Barrett’s (2024), who delves into the topic of how blurred accountability frameworks often facilitate institutional capture, resulting in political elites exerting control without formal checks or supervisions.

Additionally, it is important to note the ethical allocation of funds code, which reflects a broader institutional environment in which financial processes are non-transparent (Inkei & Kristóf, 2025). Hence, as stated by the Inkei & Kristóf(2025), the cultural budget of the government has historically been characterised by a lack of transparency, a situation which has led to the perception that the allocation of funds is not subject to international scrutiny, adding “In fact, due to the dispersed nature of competences for culture, one cannot talk about one "cultural budget". The budget section under the charge of the state secretary for culture contains aggregations like "public collections" (i.e. libraries, museums, archives directly supervised by the ministry) to which considerable amounts are earmarked without specification or listing.”(p.31). Highlighting how allocation of public funds is not explicitly explained, therefore it is difficult to perform international comparisons, undermining trust in cultural institutions as well as weakening accountability.

7.2 Netherlands

Meanwhile, the Dutch landscape shows differences in the way culture is administered. In relation to the (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024) the Minister explicitly states: “Met deze brief informeer ik uw Kamer over mijn besluiten. Ik baseer mij in de besluitvorming op de Uitgangspunten cultuursubsidies 2025 – 2028.”, which suggests that the decisions taken regarding the cultural subsidies are going to be explained publicly throughout the report (p. 2). Therefore, the minister explicitly states the criteria used, showing state-led transparency in the governance of the cultural sector (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024). Thus, providing specific financial breakdowns to the public, reinforcing open access to public spending records by referring to the detailed annex that discloses the amount of funding per institution (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024).

Thanks to this comparison, it is notable how both countries experience different cultural governance models. Shedding light on Hungary’s vague allocations and informal interventions and The Netherlands mechanism of enforcing transparency to enhance public trust as well as institutional credibility.

Chapter 6 Conclusion:

The present thesis, which was based on research into the influence of political polarization on national museums in the Netherlands and Hungary, was able to provide answers to the main research question: “*How does political polarization influence the governance of public museums in Hungary and the Netherlands?*”. Moreover, due to the comparative nature of this content analysis research, the study is essentially able to provide the reader a broader understanding of how different governance systems in the EU works, taking into considerations cultural policy documents, institutional reports, and national museum strategies across both countries

Furthermore, in order to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the case, the research approached an ecosystemic multi-level approach on both the national policy level, the institutional level through the analysis of national museums, extending to the European level. To do so, a range of reports such as the NEMO Barometer, annual museums reports and cultural policy reports were selected for this study. The investigation into the ideological disparities of governance, the level of polarisation and their subsequent impact on museums in diverse political environments, therefore, proved to be a thought-provoking subject. Especially since the findings demonstrated the ways in which museums are affected, as well as the multiple dimensions in which political pressure and polarization manifests in multiple dimensions of cultural governance. Hence, the case studies of Hungary and the Netherlands served as contrasting political models, representing polarized vs. consensus-based political systems, respectively.

The findings demonstrated that political polarization manifests in multiple dimensions of cultural governance, including curatorial museum programmes, financial mechanism, institutional autonomy, as well as leadership appointments. As a result, politics, in polarized environments, is able to influence museums choices and daily operations due to ideological pressure. A further intriguing aspect of this work is its presentation of two distinct European realities. In the context of the Hungarian landscape, a higher level of political pressure is observed in comparison with that experienced in the Netherlands. The outcome of this process is the establishment of a nation with a strong state control apparatus, which is based on the ideological alignment of museums with regard to funding structures. Furthermore, programming in museums is predicated on ideological decisions, given the institution's perception as a tool in national political narratives rather than a source of culture (Inkei & Kristóf, 2025). Hence, culture is considered as a political project in the Orbán's governance (Inkei & Kristóf, 2025). Additionally, governance strategies reflected behaviours as well as patterns of centralization, reduced transparency, and loyalty-based leadership. According to the Freedom House (2023) (institutions, such as museums, are subject to governance tensions, since they are used. This observation highlights the absence of autonomy and independence in the governance of national museums and

underscores the necessity for systemic reform. Consequently, the absence of institutional autonomy in museums leads to an inability of individuals to make independent decisions regarding their consumption experiences, especially since supporting national narratives also means avoiding critical historical reflection or pluralistic engagement. Related to David-Barrett (2024) ideologies regarding the possibility of institutional erosion under illiberal regimes.

On the other hand, the Dutch reality differs due to their arm's length governance model, characterized by a certain level of institutional independency. Therefore, the government exemplifies their financial sustain towards cultural institutions such as museums, however without interfering with cultural contents, museum's programming and decisions. As a result, cultural public institutions portrays a reality in which governance autonomy and independence is present, illustrating the need of making curatorial and exhibition decisions for oneself. As also stated by the Rijksmuseum Jaarverslag (2023, p.60) "The Rijksmuseum independently organizes exhibitions such as Vermeer and Slavery, made possible by contributions from public and private funds, demonstrating the necessary independence in collection management and programming."

Furthermore, to get more in deep, the Netherlands focuses on comparatively transparent, participatory, and professionalized cultural governance structure, which interestingly analyzed levels of accountability cycles, ethical oversight as well as decision making. Hence, reports such as Boekman Foundation(2023) richly illustrated how the governance supports museums through state funds mechanism, explaining how the state should not take part to cultural decisions, thus "should distance itself from judgements regarding the value of specif expressions of art"(p.2). Moreover, the state funding systems in the Netherlands is organized in a way that prevents direct political control (Boekman Foundation, 2023).

Thus, a recurrent theme observed in both case studies is that citizens frequently ascribe greater value to the cultural and social functions of museums than to their economic or environmental roles. This tendency was particularly evident in responses from the Netherlands, where public commentary emphasized the importance of inclusivity, education, and community engagement. Despite the escalating ideological dominance in Hungary, museum users have expressed concerns regarding the diminution of cultural spaces that foster pluralism and dialogue. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Dieckmann et al. (2021), which demonstrated that citizens prioritize social and cultural considerations when evaluating public policies, thereby underscoring the pivotal role of museums in civic and democratic life, demonstrating a degree of independence from political influence.

Implications

Implications are considered important to analyze since they explore how polarized governance affects museum integrity and why this matters for democracy and institutional design. As a result, the research showcases how governance pressure, leading to political polarisation has the power to weaken democratic cultural governance through the erosion of accountability, independency of public museums. It is notable how museums in this polarized spectrum function based on governance ideologies. However, differences between countries which are affected by it, as well as not are exposed.

In Hungary, the national (public) museums are used to serve the the governance, enforcing ideological thoughts at the expense of pluralism, freedom of expression as well as institutional independency and transparency.

Furthermore, the Netherlands showcases transparency, freedom of expression as well as institutional independency. Therefore, their aim is to support institutions through state funds, without controlling them. For instance, the Netherlands offers a transparent funding, exemplifying how the government uses funds and the amount of funds offered by each cultural sector (Raad voor Cultuur & Tweede Kamer, 2024). Suggesting a sort of distance between how museum works, as well as programming, and political pressure.

The comparative findings reinforce previous studies on the vulnerability of cultural institutions under state takeover regimes and contribute to the wider literature on discourse, governance, and the politics of cultural memory (Wodak, 2018; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023).

Limitations

The study appears to demonstrate the role of cultural governance in polarized governance environments, therefore contributing to existing research regarding political pressure in countries such as Hungary and the Netherlands. However, despite this, the research presents a variety of limitations that should be exposed, in order to include and take them into consideration throughout future research.

Starting from a limitation in data source, the research includes a number of twelve reports, including institutional reports, the NEMO barometer, and policy documents. The sources are only official, therefore they exclude a wide range of public viewpoints, informational papers, and practices, as well as dissident voices within institutions. As a result, the sources do not include unofficial individuals' opinion, but rather studies from the specific countries under consideration, as well as an overall

European overview. Moreover, the incorporation of interviews, along with ethnographic data, would have given more depth to the research. Interviews help understanding individuals opinions, emotions, and perception on the subject matter, displaying an increased understandings of the ways reality is seen. Furthermore, ethnographic data is commonly used in the behavioural and social sciences, to collect data through observations, and interviews in order to draw conclusions concerning the subject matter (University of Virginia, n.d.).

Furthermore, Cultural policies are always developing, therefore, it is hard to respond in time to shifting political landscapes. As a result, the study analyzes cultural governance between 2022 and 2025, however, possible political changes have happened and were not taken into account since the study was not able to anticipate them.

Lastly, another aspect to include as a possible limitation is based on the generalizability of the research. Specifically, the research focuses on two different countries: Hungary and The Netherlands. The countries were chosen for the different levels of polarization, contrasting a moderate polarized reality with a high polarized one. While the analysis enables in-depth insights regarding the study, the results are not intended to be universally applicable. In various political situations, cultural governance may take other forms.

Future Research

The current study involves twelve documents, hence, due to time limitations it was not possible to analyze more. However, including a larger sample size would signify expanding perspectives and integrate numerous point of views as part of the study.

Future research should also broaden the scope of the study across regions, assessing countries other than Hungary and the Netherlands, examining varying degrees of global cultural policy trends or cultural policy centralization. Moreover, a comparative study based on diverse continents could also be interesting in order to reflect about the cultural and governmental contrasts.

Moreover, as stated in the implications, an ethnographic study would be able to provide a richer insight into how political pressures are experienced internally inside national museums. Understanding how the broader audience, as well as professionals in the sector and artists feel this reality. Enhancing awareness regarding how micro-level decisions and practices are internally perceived by individuals.

It would be interesting to assess how the public perceives certain changes in museums, therefore, future studies could include public engagement, cultural participation of the public, and public trust. It is essential to assess this, in order to shape future inclusive policy strategies.

Appendix

Appendix A:

Coding tree

Title of the document	Source Type	Page Number	Excerpt/paraphrase	Codes	Definition
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 5 Objectives, main features and background	cultural policy under the Orbán governments represent the 'cultural diffusion' model, which focuses on the role of culture in strengthening national identity.	governance accountability	cultural polarization due to Orbán's government
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 5 Objectives, main features and background	Culture is not a distinct sphere separated from politics and described the function of cultural policy as creating and maintaining the political community	ideological framing	There is no autonomy perception of culture in Orbán's governance, therefore culture is seen as a political project
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 9 Public Cultural Institutions	Unlike the National Cultural Fund, Petöfi Cultural Agency distributes public grant money directly, without professional boards of trustees.	funding as loyalty source	Funding allocated based on political loyalty rather than cultural merit.
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 12 Public cultural institutions - trends and strategies	Another trend affecting public cultural institutions is centralization: the Museum of Applied Arts, the National Museum, the National Széchényi Library, the Petöfi Literary Museum, the Museum of Trade and Hospitality, and the Museum of Natural History have been merged into a Hungarian National Museum Public Collection Centre. (See 3.1.) There was also a plan to centralize local cultural	centralization of governance	Envision of public institutions
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 15 Key developments	Crises refer to this process as the "decentralization" of the Castle.	museums as ideological sites	Museums framed or used as tools in national-political narratives.
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 15 Key Developments	Public universities have been restructured by the government into public interest foundations, whose boards of trustees cannot be recalled.	politicization of culture	Museums, libraries, and universities are folded into public interest foundations- >Structural shifts which changes cultural institutions role from political or lobbyist control.
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 16 Cultural rights and ethics	"In counter attacks on national sovereignty", the government established the Office for the Defence of Sovereignty in early 2024. The office cannot yet apply legal sanctions, but it writes reports against international human rights, anti-corruption, democracy NGOs.	erosion of civil society	Reduction of space for NGOs, watchdogs, or dissenting cultural actors.
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 31 Allocation of funds	The cultural budget of the government traditionally lacks transparency, which renders international comparisons impossible without additional research. In fact, due to the dispersed nature of competencies for culture, one cannot talk about one 'cultural budget'. The budget sections under the charge of the state secretary for culture contains aggregations like "public collections" (i.e. libraries, museums, archives directly supervised by the ministry) to which considerable amounts are earmarked without specification or listing.	ethical allocation of funds	allocation of public funds is not explicitly explained, therefore it is difficult to perform international comparisons
Hungary: Compendium Cultural Policy Profile (2025)	Policy Report	p. 49 Expenditure on Government Level	Frequent ad hoc interventions significantly alter final balances from initial annual budgets.	Governance instability	Decision-making concentrated in central government or under PM's office.
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 4 - Executive Summary	The three consecutive Fidesz governments in the post 2010 period have radically diminished political and professional autonomy of most of the civil institutions and transformed them into the instruments of the central government's power, undermining the system of checks and balances	State Capture	Public institutions responded to serve private/political actors, rather than public interest.
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 5 Executive summary	Obsession with centralization, populistic rhetoric and the government's measures have divided the country's citizens on one hand into loyalists, critics and clients, and, on the other hand, those who oppose the current regime and whom the government portrays more or less as foes, e.g. the representatives of the independent NGOs and the free media.	Centralization of governance	Disparities between society, the decision-making is highly concentrated in central government, undermining institutional independence
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 4 Executive Summary	Corruption has become institutionalized and systemic in the country.	institutional corruption	Corruption described as embedded in governance structures.
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 5 Executive Summary	The split of the Hungarian society is more profound than any time in the recent thirty years.	polarization	Indicators of deep ideological and social division within the country.
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 5 Executive Summary	Those NGOs which receive more than EUR 23 000 in foreign funding per year have to register themselves as "foreign funded organizations".	civil society exclusion	Limiting or stigmatizing civil society participation in governance
Hungary: SDG Parallel Report (2018)	NGO Watchdog Reports- Civil Society Report	p. 9 Recent Developments	The free media is under pressure in many outlets, TV and radio stations have been bought by government-affiliated oligarchs and were transformed into mouthpieces of the regime.	ideological framing	Institutions' used to promote political ideologies, often undermining neutrality
Hungary: European Semester Country Report (2018)	EU Commission Report	Section 3.4 – Investment p.33	Corruption remains a major concern. The perception of corruption in Hungary is higher than in the EU overall.	institutional corruption	High perceived and actual corruption embedded in governance systems.
Hungary: European Semester Country Report (2018)	EU Commission Report	Section 3.4 – Investment	There are gaps in the anti-corruption framework. The government's strategic approach to fighting corruption continues to focus narrowly on integrity within public administration. There is no compelling evidence on the effectiveness of measures to preventing corruption.	Post governance framework	Lack of robust institutional frameworks to ensure transparency and integrity.
Hungary: European Semester Country Report (2018)	EU Commission Report	Section 3.4 – Investment	Limited transparency and restrictions on access to information hinder corruption prevention.	lack of transparency	Barriers to public insight or accountability within governance processes.
Hungary: European Semester Country Report (2018)	EU Commission Report	Section 3.4 – Investment	No measures have been taken to reduce favoritism by public officials.	political appointments	Government roles and influence distributed based on loyalty or party affiliation.
Hungary: European Semester Country Report (2018)	EU Commission Report	Section 3.4 – Investment	Hungary left the Open Government Partnership in December 2016.	withdrawal from transparency	Official disengagement from international transparency and governance standards.
International: NEMO Barometer on Political Influence on Museums (2025)	Pan-European Cultural Sector Report	p. 4 Political Pressure on Museums	About 6 out of 10 respondents reported that they feel that their museum's vision or (parts of its) programme is subject to political pressure.	political pressure on museum's	Museums report external pressure on exhibitions, programs, or narratives.
International: NEMO Barometer on Political Influence on Museums (2025)	Pan-European Cultural Sector Report	p. 6 Dimensions of Political Influence	Political influence on museums' budgets is the most witnessed area of influence by all three respondents' groups, with more than 7 in 10 respondents in the museums and other organizations respondent group, and almost 9 in 10 respondents of national museum organisations naming this area.	politicization of funding	Government funding decisions shaped by political or ideological criteria.
International: NEMO Barometer on Political Influence on Museums (2025)	Pan-European Cultural Sector Report	p. 6 Dimensions of Political Influence	Political appointment of directors and board members.	political appointments	Leaders and board members appointed for their political alignment.
International: NEMO Barometer on Political Influence on Museums (2025)	Pan-European Cultural Sector Report	P. 6 Key Themes of How Political Influence Is Manifested	Pressure to align with political agendas	ideological framing	Governance pressure aimed at reinforcing or promoting ideological worldviews.
International: NEMO Barometer on Political Influence on Museums (2025)	Pan-European Cultural Sector Report	P. 7 Rise of Polarization	More than 7 in 10 museums feel that there is a rise of polarization in their countries. Only 1.5 museums out of 10 do not feel that there is a rise of polarization in their countries.	polarization	Affectively or ideologically divided public and political sphere.
Hungary: Nations in Transit 2023	NGO Democracy Assessment Report	p. 1 Key Findings	Hungary's ongoing autocratization—which drove an annual decline second only to Russia's—and Poland's updated illiberal agenda continued to challenge democratic standards in Europe.	State Capture	Gradual transformation of institutions to serve ruling party control.
Hungary: Nations in Transit 2023	NGO Democracy Assessment Report	p. 3 War Deepens a Regional Divide	The March parliamentary elections were rife with irregularities, abuses of administrative resources, and media distortions, resulting in another supermajority for the Fidesz-led coalition.	political appointments	Use of political advantage to consolidate institutional control, including appointments.
Hungary: Nations in Transit 2023	NGO Democracy Assessment Report	p. 3 War Deepens a Regional Divide	Government-backed smear campaigns against critical NGOs and members of the National Judicial Council—considered to be Hungary's last reservoir of judicial independence—demonstrated the Orbán regime's deepening intolerance of dissenting voices.	civil society exclusion	Stigmatization and marginalization of independent civil actors.
Hungary: Nations in Transit 2023	NGO Democracy Assessment Report	p. 4 War Deepens a Regional Divide	Under the guise of unconstrained majoritarianism and a selective adherence to constitutional and legal procedures, or what Kim Lenz Scheppels calls "autocratic legalism," the ruling parties in Budapest and Warsaw have systematically co-opted the judiciary, silenced the independent media, and funnelled public resources to progovernment, illiberal civic organizations.	ideological framing	Strategic use of public institutions to promote dominant ideological narratives.

Title of the document	Source Type	Page Number	Excerpt or quote	Codes	Definition
Hungry Nations in Transit 2023	NGO Democracy Assessment Report	p. 22	Renew commitments to democratic reforms	EU governance tension	Tensions between EU legal frameworks and national governance models.
			The EU should continue efforts to condition financial assistance to these countries on their compliance with European standards for the rule of law and human rights. For example, it should remain committed to Article 7 proceedings, which aim to punish member states that violate the common values of the EU by suspending certain rights guaranteed by the Treaty on the European Union.		
The Netherlands: Short Cultural Policy Profile (2023)	Official Policy document	p. 2 Objectives	The state should distance itself from judgements regarding the value of specific expressions of art.	Art's length government	Governance model where the state funds but does not interfere with cultural content.
The Netherlands: Short Cultural Policy Profile (2023)	Official Policy document	p.2 Main Features	Part of the BIS are the six Public Cultural Funds that allocate state subsidies from an art's length principle.	Cultural funding model	State funding mechanisms structured to prevent direct political control.
The Netherlands: Short Cultural Policy Profile (2023)	Official Policy document	p. 3 Main features	The Minister of Education, Culture and Science is obliged to present a policy memorandum every four years.	policy cycle structure	Formal structures that reinforce transparent and recurring governance review.
The Netherlands: Short Cultural Policy Profile (2023)	Official Policy document	p. 6 Key Developments	Council for Culture argued that the government and stakeholders in the sector lack a long-term vision on these developments. Furthermore, several stakeholders were that the initiatives to explore new ways to digitally open up culture have migrated since the lockdowns ended, missing out on opportunities to reach audiences that were previously not reached.	Governance Gaps	Identified absence of forward-looking strategic capacity in cultural governance.
The Netherlands: Short Cultural Policy Profile (2023)	Official Policy document	p. 8 Key themes	There has been an increased call for better regional differentiation, through which all Dutch citizens have equal access to cultural activities.	Regional governance balance	Efforts to decentralize or balance governance across national and local levels.
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Sectoral Statistical Report	Section: Museum volunteers are indispensable/Replacement value of volunteers	65% of those working at museums are volunteers or interns, and that of the number of FTE's at Dutch museums is covered out by volunteers and interns. If we do not count interns, it is 67% of the working people and 20% of the number of Fte's that we can attribute to volunteers [...] (The many work that the volunteers will do in 2023 would have cost the museums between 66 million and 123 million euros if they had had it carried out by paid workers.	volunteer dependency	High reliance on volunteers in the museums sector
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Sectoral Statistical Report	Section: Income Breakdown	Quote in dutch: 1,26 miljard euro omzet, waarvan 40% eigen inkomsten en 11% overheidssubsidies. Niet direct quote (look at the scheme) According to financial data from 2022 published in the report of 2023, 49% own income, 15% government subsidies.	Income and funds sources	Breakdown of income and financial support for museums
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Sectoral Statistical Report	Section: Digitization	Translation: Compared to 2019, the proportion of the permanent collection that is accessible to the public online has increased a few percentage points, to 70% in 2023 (Figure 5.1). Museums have taken a big hit in this regard, in 2015, only 25% of the permanent collection accessible to the public online.	Digitization process	increased of permanent collection online from 20% in 2015 to 70% in 2023
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Sectoral Statistical Report	Section: Digitization	Translation: In recent years, museums have invested in the digitization of the collection from various resources. They study do this from their own resources, ranging from 54% in small museums to 63% in medium-sized museums.	Digitization financing process	Museums are financing digitization mostly with internal funds, which may indicate lack of dedicated external support, but the report does not frame it as a crisis or challenge.
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Government Policy Framework	p.3 Introduction	Culture makes it possible to discuss difficult issues and contributes to international cooperation.	Cultural diplomacy	Using culture to improve communication and collaboration between different countries.
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Government Policy Framework	p. 6 International Cultural Policy in Flux	Culture plays a key role in making dissonant voices heard in society, especially in places where freedom of expression is under pressure.	freedom of expression	Protecting and promoting artistic voices, especially when they are under threat. Using culture to encourage international dialogue and cooperation.
The Netherlands: Museumsijfen 2023 – Dutch Museum Association	Government Policy Framework	p. 7 Policy Goals	Supporting bilateral relations with other countries with the help of Dutch cultural activities. This improves the position and reputation of the Netherlands abroad. It encourages reciprocal cooperation. It contributes to exchanges and dialogue, also with countries with which we have a complex relationship.	bilateral cultural relations	Using cultural projects to improve relations between countries.
The Netherlands: International Cultural Policy 2023–2028	Government Policy Framework	P. 14 Colonial Collections	The restitution of art and artefacts and cooperation between museums help to correct historical injustices and improve bilateral relations.	colonial restitution	Bringing back cultural heritage as a way to make peace after colonial times.
The Netherlands: International Cultural Policy 2023–2028	Government Policy Framework	p. 16 Digitalisation	Digitalisation strengthens the innovative power of the cultural sector and can help to reach a new and larger international audience.	digital governance	Using digital tools to make cultural services available to more people.
The Netherlands: Culture Monitor 2023 – General Report (Bookman Foundation)	Sector-Wide Monitoring Report	p. 8 How We Produce the Culture Monitor	The Bookman Foundation's researchers continuously gather data and insights on the various domains and themes. They do this together and in consultation with stakeholders and experts from the sector, who feed the Monitor with indispensable and in-depth knowledge and information.	stakeholder informed governance	Everyone involved works together to make the best decisions. This means sharing information about the sector and getting input from the relevant people (e.g. stakeholders)
The Netherlands: Culture Monitor 2023 – General Report (Bookman Foundation)	Sector-Wide Monitoring Report	p. 102 Heritage	Most museums are located in Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland (19.9 and 16.7 per cent respectively of the 2021 total), and more than half of all museums are history museums.	museum distribution/topology	This is a summary of the different types of public museums and where they are located.
The Netherlands: Culture Monitor 2023 – General Report (Bookman Foundation)	Sector-Wide Monitoring Report	p. 98 Heritage Domain	The Heritage domain page provides information and statistics on various aspects of the field including the availability of movable and immovable cultural assets. It also addresses issues related to the cultural significance of heritage and discusses who gets to define what heritage is.	Cultural heritage authority	who have power over how heritage is valued and sorted into groups by museums. Directly touches on governance questions: who decides what is worth preserving and why.
The Netherlands: Culture Monitor 2023 – General Report (Bookman Foundation)	Sector-Wide Monitoring Report	p. 102 Museum Finance (Figure 4)	Figure shows breakdown of museum income(2015-2020) between: government subsidies, other subsidies, entrance fees, cafe/shop revenue, sponsorship, and self-generated income.	museum funding structure	Here is some information about how revenue is distributed to museums.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2026	Government Policy Letter	p. 2 Introduction	Translation: Culture is an indispensable part of our democratic society. The freedom that underpins our society is inseparable from the freedom offered by art: in theatres and museums, at the chest or at a festival, people meet and the conversation on social issues is nurtured.	culture as a democratic infrastructure	Framing cultural institutions as fundamental to democratic discourse and participation. anchoring museums as civic instruments in the political discourse - linking cultural policy with social policy.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2026	Government Policy Letter	p. 2 Introduction	Met deze brief informeer ik uw Kamer over mijn beleiden. Ik besaar mij in de beslissvorming op de Uitgangspunten cultuursubsidies 2025 - 20262.	public transparency in decision	The Minister publicly reports on the decisions taken and explicitly states the criteria used. This is an example of state-led transparency in the governance of the cultural sector.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2026	Government Policy Letter	P. 2 Introduction	in de bijlage vindt u een uitlegging van dit bedrag	budgetary disclosure practice	Reinforces open access to public spending records by referring to the detailed annex that discloses the amount of funding per institution.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2026	Government Policy Letter	p. 3 Criteria	Translation: Five criteria were used for the by period 2025–2026: 1. Artistic and/or substantive quality 2. Social significance 3. Accessibility 4. Business health 5. Geographical distribution	institutional funding criteria	Criteria used to allocate government funding for the arts, showing the structural governance logic behind public funding that shapes who receives institutional support.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2026	Government Policy Letter	p.5 Governance Code Culture	Translation: Supervisors have a special responsibility. They are primarily responsible for the proper spending of public money. Supervision is not a job of honour, but a serious social responsibility.	governance accountability	the cultural and creative sector needs strong governance frameworks, therefore the supervision roles in BIS-fundat institutions are not meant to be honorary titles, these are public fiduciary duties. these duties reinforces governance integrity and transparency, particularly for subsidized museums.

Title of the document	Source Type	Page Number	Excerpt or quote	Codes	Definition
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2028	Government Policy Letter	p.6 Fair Practice Code	Translation: For institutions that receive subsidies from the bio, the additional fair pay funds are accompanied by the duty to pay fairly. For these institutions, they will have to commit to collective rate agreements (collective agreement or the guidelines) by 1 January 2025	Fair pay obligation	Mandatory compliance with sector-wide labour and wage standards. Institutional funding linked to labour governance - linking ethics to financial support.
		p.8 Conclusion	Translation: But the culture budget requires making choices. This letter gives insight into the outcome for the coming period [...] also see the bottlenecks in the system.	cultural budget tensions	Signals that, even though the Netherlands has a strong system for managing culture – including rules for funding, how much artists should be paid, and how their work is checked – the system is under pressure. Instead of policies getting in the way, the problems are about money, how well organisations can do their jobs, and other things that people want. These limits shape how public museums operate and can indirectly affect how they are governed by making it harder to be flexible.
The Netherlands: Prinsjesdagbrief Culturele Basisinfrastructuur 2025–2028	Government Policy Letter	p.14 Voorwoord	Translation: Since the beginning of 2023, a presentation about slavery, based on the 2021 exhibition, travels the world, starting at the United Nations headquarters in New York.	Cultural diplomacy	Focus on international cultural diplomacy through museum exhibitions that challenge historical injustices, demonstrating the museum's autonomous role in global conversations. Therefore, this quote shows how the Rijksmuseum uses sensitive topics, such as slavery, colonial injustices at an international level. Also showing how the museum is able to choose independently their exhibitions even if the topics could be political controversial, portraying the idea of the art's long-term governance model of museums institutions in the Netherlands.
Rijksmuseum jaarverslag 2023	Annual Report	p. 60 Bestuurverslag	Translation: The Rijksmuseum independently organizes exhibitions such as Vermeer and Slavery, made possible by contributions from public and private funds, demonstrating the necessary independence in collection management and programming.	Museum arm's length governance	Despite reliance on public and commercial funding, the institution demonstrates governance autonomy in curatorial and exhibition decisions. As a result, there is an independent dispute over who funds the museum. Political polarization does not immediately endanger museum autonomy, according to the "arm's length" approach.
Hungarian National Museum- Reimagining Public Collections 2024	Conference Report	p.7 David Ráai's speech	The Europe that the people of the next century will live in will depend on the technology of today and the level of commitment to preservation. We must treat what our ancestors created with the least responsive responsibility.	museum digital governance	Museums are being portrayed as part of a bigger national political project using technology to preserve the nation's culture. The quote also shows the idea that public cultural organisations must link their activities with official missions (digitalisation + preservation + national history).
Hungarian National Museum- Reimagining Public Collections 2024	Conference Report	p. 9 Misi Vincze's speech	The Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Innovation is focusing on new ways to try to free our institutions to match our to people who have probably less access to products than before. One of our new initiatives is called the Library Challenge.	museum stakeholders informed	The state puts pressure on cultural institutions to follow government priorities. Political polarization has resulted in increased government participation in public institutions, driving museums towards direct public interaction based on political purposes (for example, national pride, language training, and government-defined inclusion).

Appendix B

Coding tree:

code	sub theme	theme		
polarization	Societal fragmentation	Polarization & Societal Division		
politicization of culture	Societal fragmentation	Polarization & Societal Division		
state capture	Societal fragmentation	Polarization & Societal Division		
centralization of governance	Societal fragmentation	Polarization & Societal Division		
governance accountability	Models of governance	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
arm's length government	Models of governance	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
Museum arm's length government	Models of governance	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
centralization of governance (decision-making)	Models of governance	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
cultural funding model	Allocation logics	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
institutional funding criteria	Allocation logics	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
policy cycle structure	Allocation logics	Governance Structures & Autonomy		
stakeholder-informed governance	Participatory policymaking	Civic Space & Participation		
Museum stakeholder-informed governance	Participatory policymaking	Civic Space & Participation		
regional governance balance	Participatory policymaking	Civic Space & Participation		
erosion of civil society	Civil society repression	Civic Space & Participation		
cultural heritage authority	Narrative co-ownership	Civic Space & Participation		
museum distribution/typology	Landscape of institutions	Civic Space & Participation		
cultural budget tensions	Sustainability constraints	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
volunteer dependency	Sustainability constraints	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
digitization (financing) process	Sustainability constraints	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
Museum digital governance	Sustainability constraints	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
digital governance	Sustainability constraints	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
museum income/funding structure	Budget evolution	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
funding as loyalty source	funding structure	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure	Museums as Cultural Instruments	
museum funding structure	funding structure	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
income and funds sources	funding structure	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
politicization of fundings	funding structure	Funding Logic & Financial Pressure		
bilateral cultural relations	Cultural democracy	Historical & Ethical Positioning		
EU governance tension	Cultural democracy	Historical & Ethical Positioning		
colonial restitution	Cultural democracy	Historical & Ethical Positioning		
museums cultural diplomacy	Cultural democracy	Historical & Ethical Positioning		
freedom of expression	Cultural democracy	Historical & Ethical Positioning		

Appendix C

AI declaration form content:

Erasmus School of
History, Culture and
Communication

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Student Information

Name: Giulia Francesca Azzalini

Student ID: 600321

Course Name: Master in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Instructor Name: Carlotta Sciolto

Assignment Title: Master thesis

Date: 11/06/2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works with limited user input.

GenAI use could include, but is not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Quillbot)
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, debugging code, Gemini Deep Research)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books. (e.g. Perplexity AI)
-

For any GenAI task, 1) it must be permitted by the course and 2) you are responsible for verifying the accuracy of the outputs used in any submission. Improper use of sources obtained from GenAI could constitute academic fraud.

Also, 3) the requested prompts/logs (under Extent of AI Usage below) may be either screenshots or textual copies. The appendix can be included as part of the main submission or submitted as a separate document. Check with your lecturer.

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Grammarly and Quillbot], in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the assignment were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of my GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Erasmus School of
History, Culture and
Communication

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

Signature:
[digital
signature]
Date of
Signature:
[Date of
Submission]

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aida Azzi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date of Signature: 11/06/2025

I used AI to improve my abstract, and I used Grammarly for spelling.

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