

# Evaluation for The CoMuseum Conference 2022



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# 1. Introduction

This report provides a headline evaluation of the 12<sup>th</sup> CoMuseum, which took place in Athens and Thessaloniki, December 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 2022. The report describes the role and relevance of CoMuseum as a major international symposium and meeting point for museums and cultural professionals who work with museums and other cultural organisations. It reflects on the key themes of CoMuseum 2022 - Culture, Care and Healing; themes which are particularly profound given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent re-framing of the role, value and impact of culture. With CoMuseum 2022 being a hybrid event, meaning it facilitated its first major in-person gathering since the start of the pandemic while enabling digital participation, the symposium also enabled participants to consider different approaches to dialogue, knowledge exchange and relationship-building.

We all know that Covid-19 has radically disrupted and remodelled how we connect, work and socialise. CoMuseum 2022 provided an opportunity to consider how museums can adapt and innovate in this period of re-alignment and resettling. Plus, it helped us to consider how we can come together in both a physical and digital format to explore such matters. The report begins with a brief overview of CoMuseum 2022. This is followed by consideration of the conference's themes and why they matter for museums and the wider cultural sector. Headlines from a sample of speakers are summarised and linked to a set of strategic issues for museums in terms of their role and value proposition with regard to care and healing and within the context of broader agendas that link culture to health and wellbeing.



*Benaki Museum/Pireos 138*

The report then focuses on the direct experience of CoMuseum – for both the main plenary sessions and masterclasses in Athens and the interdisciplinary event “CoMuseum Co-Lab” in Thessaloniki. This includes a set of learning points for future CoMuseum events, both in terms of practical factors such as the quality of event production, and strategic factors such as future topics, themes and agendas which can shape the CoMuseum programme.

The report concludes with a set of broad opportunity fields for CoMuseum’s partners to consider. These relate to the ways CoMuseum can convene purposeful dialogue and partnership, catalyse innovation, and activate new models for museum development over and above “The CoMuseum conference”. This is because, as this report demonstrates, CoMuseum is very well-regarded by museum professionals as a critical platform and hub for museum innovation which has considerable potential to influence new types of practice and inspire a new generation of cultural leadership.

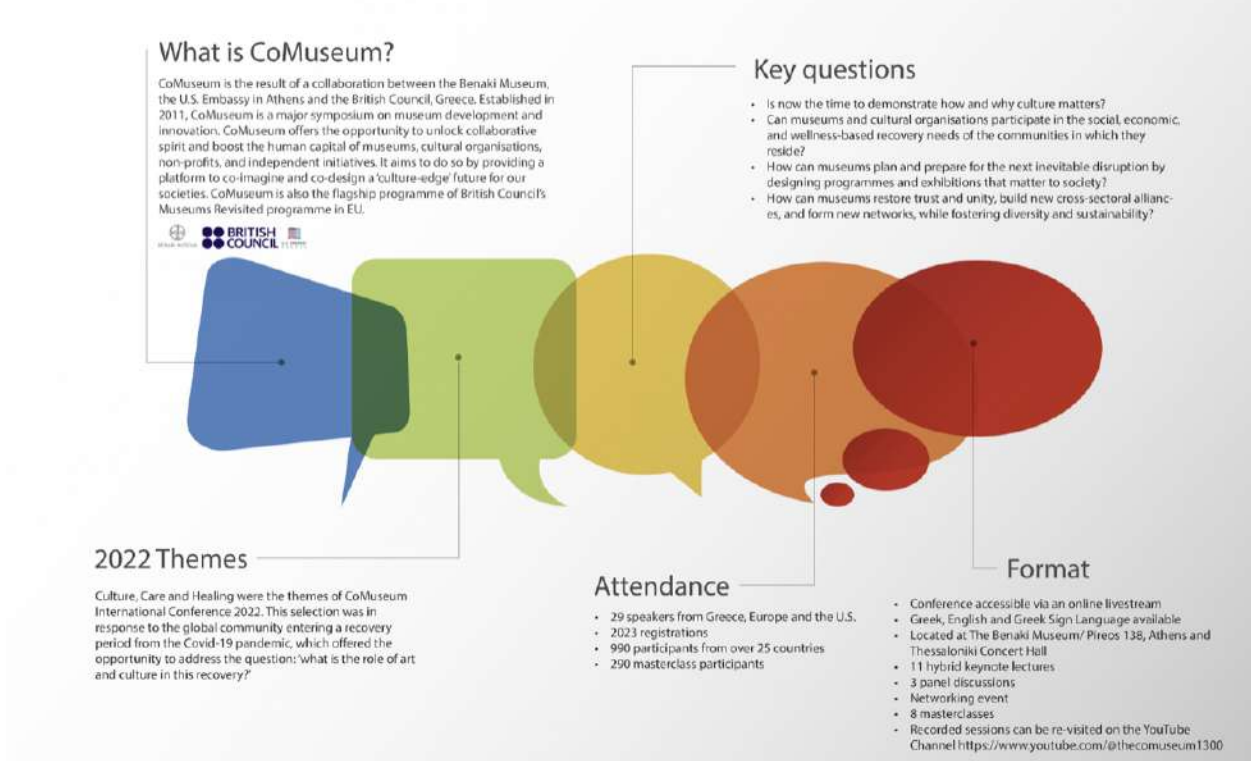
## 2. Culture, Care and Healing: CoMuseum 2022

Culture, Care and Healing were the themes of CoMuseum International Conference 2022. This thematic priority was in response to the global community entering a recovery period from the Covid-19 pandemic, which offered the opportunity to address the question: *‘what is the role of art and culture in this recovery?’*. Plus, in this moment of significant fragility and change, wider questions relating to inclusion, equality and access have become more central in the very concept of a museum, not least in terms of who participates and how museums can deliver positive impacts for all parts of society. Add to this the refugee crisis, geopolitical tensions and economic challenges, the role and value of a museum in recovery, for care and healing becomes an ever more central consideration for museums across the world.

Under the premise that recovery periods present an opportunity for mobilisation, change and innovation – for humans, institutions, societies, democracies, economies and ecologies - CoMuseum sought to address a number of pressing questions:

- *Is now the time to demonstrate how and why culture matters?*
- *Can museums and cultural organisations participate in the social, economic, and wellness-based recovery needs of the communities in which they reside?*
- *How can museums plan and prepare for the next inevitable disruption by designing programmes and exhibitions that matter to society?*
- *How can museums restore trust and unity, build new cross-sectoral alliances, and form new networks, while fostering diversity and sustainability?*

# CoMuseum 2022



CoMuseum 2022 explored these questions through a hybrid programme which include activities in both Athens and Thessaloniki:

## In Athens

The Benaki Museum / Pireos 138, Athens, was host to the first two days of CoMuseum 2022, December 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>. On day one there were a total of **11 keynote lectures** of which all were hybrid (5 live and 6 virtual) and **3 panel discussions**, followed by a **networking event**. On day two there were **8 masterclasses**.

## In Thessaloniki

Day three of CoMuseum 2022, on the 9th of December, took place in Thessaloniki at Thessaloniki Concert Hall. This was produced as a Co-Lab.

*“a special, interdisciplinary, and interactive event engaging the local community to explore the key themes of the conference and identify new ideas, projects, processes around care and healing in the cultural sphere” (CoMuseum participant, 2022).*

## 2.1 Culture as an Agency: Care, Healing and Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected billions of lives across the globe. In addition to the devastating loss of life and the impact on health care systems, it has brought economic hardship to almost every area of the world economy. In the culture sector, many artists and cultural professionals have lost their livelihoods, while cultural organisations and institutions have faced prolonged disruption to their operations.

The pandemic has exposed the structural fragility of the significance of the culture of care not only in culture but in society at large - at every level and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. It has thrown the sector's fault lines into sharp relief. This includes systemic under-investment in culture as a foundation for sustainable development, the marginalisation of diverse cultural expressions from public life, and a lack of support for cultural practitioners to develop capacity and skills which in turn deliver impact in areas such as social cohesion, environmental responsibility, health and wellbeing.

UNESCO, in its global report - [Culture in Times of COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Revival](#) – points to the deleterious impact of Covid-19 on the capacity of the cultural sector to deliver positive outcomes, such as for recovery and health, at a time when awareness of the potential for such outcomes is high and when the need for such outcomes is palpable. UNESCO highlights the role institutions such as museums and artists such as film-makers, writers and painters have in supporting a process of healing and recovery, including their influence on building a more participatory and inclusive society. But UNESCO also raises the alarm that the capacity of culture to drive impact is diminished due to the lack of resources, platforms and tools which champion cultural practice as force for good. Such platforms and tools include effective partnerships that foreground culture and help elevate cultural practice to deliver wider societal impact, inclusive of impacts on science and health.

The Resilience, Recovery and Revival report raises the stakes by making the connection between a healthy cultural sector and a healthy society:

*“There is more at stake than merely supporting the sector’s recovery. Cultural diversity and the diversity of cultural expressions – of crucial importance to our individual and collective heritage, our creative wealth, social cohesion and economic recovery – hang in the balance.”*

This has implications for the types of cultural or culture-led activities which can be positively impactful for care and healing – the thematic priorities for CoMuseum 2022. Moreover, the uneven impact of the pandemic and ensuing crisis mean that some

cultural models are more fragile than others; there are very significant differences by global region, country and even at a local scale; and particular demographic groups are most at risk – in terms of capacity to produce culture, participate in culture, and access associated health benefits. Women, children and minorities, especially indigenous communities, are disproportionately marginalised from access to culture and thus from its impact on wellbeing. OECD, in their 2022 Culture Fix report, point to inequality of access and opportunity across the cultural sector.



**8hrs** of the CoMuseum Conference  
**14,5hrs** of Masterclasses  
**29 Speakers** from Greece, Europe and the U.S.  
**2023** Registrations  
**990** Participants from over **25 countries**, physical and virtual attendance  
**290** Masterclass participants, physical and virtual attendance



## 2.1.1 Building Purposeful Partnerships: The Strategic Relevance of CoMuseum 2022

The culture sector's response to the consequences of COVID-19 is complex and nuanced. For every innovation or story of resilience, there are examples of unequal opportunities and talent loss. Yet, within this complex and still in the developing picture, **three core trends** are becoming apparent which will influence and shape both cultural practice and cultural partnership in the coming years. These are explored in more detail in UNESCO's report Culture in Times of COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Revival. *These are very relevant to the themes for and rationale of CoMuseum 2022 and they shaped the topics and priorities developed across the plenary sessions, workshops and the co-lab:*

### **A. Enhanced emphasis on the culture sector's social value.**

The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – [MONDIACULT Summit](#) held in Mexico City in September 2022 brought together 150 Governments to set out ambitions for culture as a foundation for sustainable development. The Mondiacult Summit set out a joint declaration that culture should be recognised as a public good. This means culture in its broadest sense, inclusive of the arts, should be understood, valued and invested in as a fundamental human right and a vital agent of change in the fight against climate change, populism, inequality and other global challenges.

*These are all profound issues for museums and cultural organisations and position CoMuseum as a key moment to explore and reframe notions of cultural value.*

### **B. Rise of collaboration increased sectoral solidarity and the emergence of fresh impact-driven partnerships.**

The COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis and ensuing socio-economic challenges, have required distinct parts of the culture sector to work together with a new sense of urgency and shared purpose. There are many examples of cultural organisations making a joint case to governments for investment and support; of artists and cultural professionals self-organising to share knowledge, survival tactics and build a collective voice in response to perceived neglect by governments and civil society. There are also new or revitalised collaboration and partnership modalities, including those for culture and health as well as, culture and climate change. The pandemic has catalysed new

transdisciplinary activities that fuse culture, science and health, as well as other key global development fields.

*This positions CoMuseum as a vital meeting point and exchange platform for the role of museums as conveners of collaboration and enablers of solidarity. It also positions CoMuseum as a vector for the development of new collaboration-based models which can drive sector development.*



Panel Discussion | Live from Benaki Museum Auditorium / Pireos 138  
Care – Healing

### **C. Rapid (re)alignment of culture, health and wellbeing.**

Recognition of the role of culture in delivering impact for health and wellbeing is not new. The World Health Organisation has consistently emphasised the role of culture in enhancing health outcomes – both as a preventative intervention and as part of a treatment. Cultural prescribing is a now widespread activity in the global north, with dedicated models of cultural provision supporting both mainstream and specialist health provision. New partnerships have been formed to co-design and deliver cultural prescribing models and / or tailored culture for health activities.

The 2022 EU Culture for Health Report presents a landmark intervention in culture and health discourse and policy development in Europe. Based on extensive evidence capture and consultation with culture and health professionals across Europe, the report asserts that a:

*“Holistic approaches can be offered by cultural activities, as they help shift the focus away from specific illnesses to a broader understanding of health. In this way, culture supports health and well-being at the individual level (supporting physical and mental health, and subjective well-being), at the community level (supporting social inclusion, and engaged, resilient communities) and at the economic level (resulting in what the OECD describes as an economy of well-being). Cultural participation can also reinforce active (health) citizenship, supporting patients when developing their own health strategies, stimulating conversations around different medical options and strengthening the relations between citizens and health policymakers”.*



*Arts' impact on health and wellbeing: A policy perspective with Nicholas Yatromanolakis, Deputy Minister of Culture and Sports, responsible for Contemporary Culture (GR)*

Furthermore, culture has always been part of scientific inquiry and advancement, with culture informing both the ethics and perceived efficacy of science and contributing to the generation of scientific knowledge, its communication and socialisation. Increasingly, culture is positioned as a contributor to scientific discovery, with artists and cultural practitioners valued for their capacity to cross boundaries, embrace dissonance and see around the corner to alternate realities. Plus, the aesthetics of science are intensified and enhanced through creative interpretation and expression, often through the exhibitions, events and public engagement activities of museums.

*The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of this transdisciplinary reality, with culture increasingly recognised as an agency for innovation and impact. As a consequence, new activities are emerging, fresh partnerships are being formed and a dynamic fusion of purpose and practice is surfacing in different ways across a diversity of geographies. CoMuseum 2022 provided an opportunity to reflect on how cultural organisations are working as innovators but also how they need to adapt and reform to maximise their impact and support their sustainability.*



*“Let them finally be heard!” How integrating a multiplicity of voices may lead to more inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies with Kathrin Pabst, Project Leader Identity on the Line (I-ON), Head of the Scientific Department, Vest-Agder-museet IKS (NO)*

## 2.2 Culture, Museums, Care and Healing: CoMuseum 2022

CoMuseum 2022 provided an opportunity to explore how museums and, more broadly, the cultural sector, are delivering impact for care and healing within a wider strategic context of culture for health and sustainable development. Keynote presentations set out a series of rich and engaging agendas, including examples of good practice (e.g. on museums supporting intercultural dialogue, museums building trust with vulnerable communities, and the role of museums in dealing with trauma and a range of health challenges), as well as the challenges which the cultural sector faces in this time of profound change and systemic fragility.

### 2.2.1 Plenary Headlines

The **plenary sessions** at the Benaki Museum connected the changing policy landscape to examples of innovative practice, with a majority of speakers.

- **Nicholas Yatromanolakis**, *Deputy Minister of Culture and Sports, responsible for Contemporary Culture (GR)* provided a policy perspective on the impact of arts and culture on health and wellbeing. He also announced a new cultural prescription scheme for Greece.
- **Dr Karen Mak**, *Research Fellow in Quantitative Social Science, UCL (UK)*, provided a virtual presentation on the impacts of arts and cultural engagement: evidence from population-based surveys
- **Brenda Cowan**, Professor, Exhibition & Experience Design, Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY (U.S.) gave an inspiring overview of the role of museum objects in healing and well-being.
- **Victoria Hume**, *Director of the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance (UK)*, introduced areas of good practice approaches to creative health, citing approaches to partnership and programme development.
- **Catherine Devine**, *Global Director, Business Strategy – Libraries and Museums, Microsoft Tech for Social Impact (U.S.)*, spoke of the importance of wellbeing in the cultural workforce: 'balancing productivity and wellbeing in cultural institutions – focusing on the employee experience'
- **Prof Fiona Kearney**, *Director, the Glucksman, University College Cork (IE)*, provided an inspiring overview of the work of the Glucksman as an agency for community empowerment through contemporary art practices
- **Dr Nuala Morse**, *Lecturer in Museum Studies, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester (UK)*, gave a virtual presentation on re-imagining museums as spaces of care, health and recovery, based on her book "The Museum as a Space of Social Care".

- **Kathrin Pabst**, *Project Leader Identity on the Line (I-ON)*, *Head of the Scientific Department, Vest-Agder-museet IKS (NO)* asserted: “Let them finally be heard!” - How integrating a multiplicity of voices may lead to more inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies. Referencing her project I-ON, Kathrin spoke of the role of museums and the cultural sector in supporting people to deal with trauma.
- **Hans Looijen**, *Director, Museum van de Geest (Museum of the Mind) (NL)*, gave a virtual presentation on how museums can be responsible partners to deliver impact in culture and health. Hans spoke of the Museum of Mind and how the museum is responsible for sharing untold stories and experiences of people who were not represented in museums for a long time.
- **Angela Lombardi**, *Director of Outreach and Audience Engagement at North Carolina Museum of Art (U.S.)*, described how a museum can operate as a ‘refuge’ – a safe, intercultural space which supports wellbeing.
- **Nathalie Bondil**, *Director of Museum and Exhibitions, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (FR)*, provided a virtual presentation on ‘Museotherapy’ and the notion of a museum as an agency for ‘good’.

**Headline messages** from the Plenary Sessions included:

The importance of museums as safe and inclusive spaces which can support communities to recover, heal and enhance their wellbeing.

*“Objects are impactful in our everyday lives; objects are very similarly impactful in our museum environments. Moreover, they support our wellbeing, help our mental health and our healing. Our bodies require nutrients to stay physically well, so do humans require object encounters in order to stay psychologically well”* (Brenda Cowan).

*“When museums address collective traumas, they can help very many people. Museums have a duty to collect personal narratives/ subjective stories, revise the historical frame so that more people feel seen and heard in a museum”* (Kathrin Pabst).

Museums can be hubs of innovation in delivering impact in health and wellbeing, testing new models and co-developing solutions with professionals across a variety of fields.

*“Post-Covid there was a chance for ‘a deep systemic change’ in the way we see the connection between culture and healthcare. The end goal is ‘cultural prescription’ where doctors and healthcare professionals would be able to prescribe nationwide, within the national healthcare system, art projects and art activities to patients”* (Nicholas Yatromanolakis).

*“Early analysis of social prescribing shows that it helped reduce demand for GP appointments by 48%” (Karen Mak).*



*Museum objects, healing and well-being with Brenda Cowan, Professor, Exhibition & Experience Design, Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY (U.S.)*

To maximise impact, museums need to focus on reform – in terms of governance, strategy, use of technology, staff wellbeing and approach to partnership.

*“The employee experience impacts an organisation’s success” (Catherine Devine).*

*“Museums have always been about the care of objects but what I am interested in thinking about is what happens if we seriously extend the notion of care to the whole of the museum” (Nuala Morse).*

*“How we can be full of care but not too careful and tentative in our actions. Now, more than ever, we need to support our artists to take creative risks, to demonstrate adventurous thinking in our own museums and collaborate with our communities to provide thought leadership in our regions” (Fiona Kearney).*

To conceptualise a museum as ‘without walls’ – an open, porous resource which supports healing and care.

*“We can’t live with art on the walls only, we need interpretation, we need outreach, we need to build those relationships that bring people back to us by going outside of our walls and meeting them and bringing them in” (Angela Lombardi).*

*“We should care not only for the collections that are entrusted to us but for society at large, this can lead to a more inclusive society” (Hans Looijen).*



*The impacts of arts and cultural engagement: evidence from population-based surveys with Dr Karen Mak, Research Fellow in Quantitative Social Science, UCL (UK)*



## 2.2.2 Panel Discussions, Master Classes and Co-Lab

The **Panel Discussions**, which took place on the main stage at the Benaki Museum, provided an opportunity to share ideas, challenge core concepts and build some strategic opportunities for museums:

- **Museums of Care** – with Sebastian Cichocki, Chief Curator, Modern Art Museum in Warsaw (PL), Prof Fiona Kearney, Director, the Glucksman, University College Cork (IE), and Dr Alessia Fassone, Curator, Egyptian Museum of Turin (IT); moderated by Dr Sophia Handaka, CoMuseum Host, Curator of World Cultures, Benaki Museum (GR)
- **Culture – Society – Health** – with Dr Marlen Mouliou, Assistant Professor of Museology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA) (GR), Dr Lida Tsene, Founder, Athens Comics Library (GR), Dimitris Trikas, Journalist, Museologist (GR); moderated by Mary Adamopoulou, Journalist, TA NEA newspaper (GR).
- **Care – Healing** – with Haroula Hadjinicolaou, Art Historian, Project leader It's Museum Time, Educational Department, Benaki Museum (GR), Maria Kokorotskou, Curator of Education, MOMus-Thessaloniki Museum of Photography (GR), Denise Nikolakou, Integrative Psychotherapist, Head Programmer of Cinematherapy – Drama International Short Film Festival (GR), Paraskevi Sakka, Neurologist – Psychiatrist, Alzheimer Athens, National Observatory for Dementia and Alzheimer Disease (GR); moderated by Mary Adamopoulou, Journalist, TA NEA newspaper (GR).

**The Master Classes**, which took place the day after the plenary and panel discussion sessions, drew on the expertise of CoMuseum speakers, providing an opportunity to deep-dive on a range of strategic and practice-based areas for museums. This is a key quality of CoMuseum: enabling participants to engage with experts, explore and test ideas, and scope development areas which may be of relevance to their museum 'back home'. For 2022, Master Classes focused on:

- **Diving deep into optimising employee experience.** *Catherine Devine, Global Director, Business Strategy – Libraries & Museums, Microsoft Tech for Social Impact (U.S.)*

- **The Art Library: Commissioning art with and for communities.** *Prof Fiona Kearney, Director, the Glucksman, University College Cork (IE)*
- **Objects of Life and Health.** *Professor Brenda Cowan, Exhibition & Experience Design, Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY (U.S.)*
- **Moral challenges in museum development.** *Kathrin Pabst, Project Leader Identity on the Line (I-ON), Head of the Scientific Department, Vest-Agder-museet IKS (NO)*
- **Ethics of care in the museum.** *Hans Looijen, Director, Museum van de Geest (NL)*
- **Locally Rooted, Globally Connected.** *Artemis Stamatiadis, Director of Outset Greece and Nicolette Cavaleros, Co-Director and Trustee of Outset UK*
- **Museology and Neuropsychology: New interdisciplinary synapses.** *Dr Helen Anyfandi, Psychologist, BSc, Clinical Neuropsychologist, MSc, PhD (GR) & Dr Marlen Mouliou, Assistant Professor of Museology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA) (GR)*
- **Expressions of Community Care in the Museum.** *Angela Lombardi, Director of Outreach and Audience Engagement at North Carolina Museum of Art (U.S.).*

**The “Museum Co-Lab”**, held at Thessaloniki Concert Hall on December 9<sup>th</sup> (brought together museum, cultural and care professionals of different levels of expertise and experience to exchange experiences and knowhow in matters of culture and health. The half-day interactive session sought to provoke participants to consider health and wellbeing as a priority for museums and cultural institutions.

*“For Greece the year 2022 marks a 15-year period of constant crises, which left and still leaves scars in the social tissue of the country. Culture and creative outlets are proven to be healing agents of change and the community of the Co-Museum worked collectively and collaboratively to propose concrete actions and cultural activities that will contribute to the recovery and the development of our societies, institutions, and relationships” (Co-Lab concept note).*

The Co-Lab process sought to help the local community build a shared understanding, enable it to visualise the future and thus connect the issues with proposed actions in short and medium term, sparking at the same time new cross-sectoral connections and collaborations.

The presence of international experts who also participated in the CoMuseum plenary and panel sessions, brought specific areas of knowledge into the Co-Lab discussions and provided a narrative continuity with the wider CoMuseum programme. By holding the Co-Lab in Thessaloniki, CoMuseum was able to reach a broader spectrum of participants and explore Thessaloniki-specific ideas, challenges, and opportunities on the role of museums in healing and care.



*“Museum Co-Lab”, held at Thessaloniki Concert Hall*

The **Satellite Programme**, a series of additional visits and conversations that took place on the second day of the CoMuseum conference, enabled further networking, created more opportunities and connected international guests with the local arts and culture community in Athens. This was also a key element in the British Council

Museum's Revisited programme in the EU. The main purpose of the Satellite Programme was to facilitate the exchange of knowledge at a local and regional level and to promote the CoMuseum Conference by exploring possibilities for future synergies and cooperation.

*"The CoMuseum Satellite experience was the perfect mix: interesting speakers during the conference combined to make a very enjoyable satellite programme, giving us the opportunity to reflect for three days on different topics from different perspectives, inspired by the beautiful and magnetic city of Athens." (Valeria Arrabito, Italy)*

The museum sector in Athens responded very positively to our request for hosting those visits and Directors and Head of Departments from Museums and Galleries offered a warm welcome to the Satellite Programme delegates and speakers, within their organisations.

*"It was a privilege and a pleasure to be there in person – the formal presentations were outstanding, but it was really special to be present for the exploratory conversations, delightful connections and thoughtful reflections that took place in the interstitial spaces of the gathering." (Prof Fiona Kearney)*

### 3. CoMuseum 2022: Headline Data and Survey Responses

CoMuseum organisers conducted a survey to understand the role, value and impact of CoMuseum. This included specific practical considerations – e.g., on access, timetables, and the efficacy of the hybrid model.

CoMuseum 2022 was genuinely international.

Facilitated by the hybrid model, participants came from at least 25 different countries. Given the physical location of the CoMuseum, the majority of participants were Greek. However, participants also either joined digitally or in person from countries as diverse as the USA, Finland, Chile, UK, Spain, France, Poland and India and EU countries participating in the British Council's Museums Revisited programme for the EU in which the CoMuseum Conference is the flagship programme. The communications and promotional work of the key conference partners was effective in attracting museum and cultural professionals from across the world. E-invitations and social media were the core tools for reaching and attracting participants. The CoMuseum website provided an impactful hub for programme information as well as the Museums Revisited EU / UK comms channels and the partners' social media platforms.



*Balancing productivity and wellbeing in cultural institutions – focusing on the employee experience with Catherine Devine, Global Director, Business Strategy – Libraries and Museums, Microsoft Tech for Social Impact (U.S.)*

CoMuseum 2022 convened museum and cultural professionals from a range of backgrounds, experiences and specialisms.

This included eminent museum professionals, curators, academics, culture managers, librarians, artists, health professionals and students. The Co-Lab enabled participants to come together who might otherwise not have met, convening dialogue from across the cultural and health sectors.

CoMuseum 2022 brought together genuine expertise, with high quality presentations and a good blend of perspectives.

From different types of museums as well as expertise from policy and academia. Satisfaction levels with the quality of the programme were high.

CoMuseum 2022 covered a rich and engaging set of topics, providing insight and inspiration on the role of museums on healing and care.

Areas which were perhaps under-explored include (drawn from the Survey):

- The artist's perspective on caring and healing: *"the focus was limited to the institutional perspective"*

- More concrete research and evidence presented on the science and arts as medicine
- The practical dimension – i.e., how to go from recognising the value and impact of museums to delivering practical projects and programmes.

CoMuseum 2022 delivered an effective balance between the virtual and in-person.

It was a genuinely hybrid event. The majority of participants attended on-line. Some participants attended both on-line and in person. However, there were some programmatic challenges. For example, the digital presentations tended to be longer and less responsive to the dynamics of the room. This resulted in a very congested programme in Day 1 and to some thematic gaps between speakers who were able to adjust their presentations based on the dynamics of the conference hall and those virtual presentations which were relatively detached from these dynamics. CoMuseum 2022 provided a compelling, fulfilling and for many an inspiring programme, which focused on one of the core issues of our time: healing and care.



*On the Museum as Refuge with Angela Lombardi, Director of Outreach and Audience Engagement at North Carolina Museum of Art (U.S.)*

However, the survey responses suggest Day 1 (plenary and panel discussions) was over-programmed, with too many speakers and significant slippage in the timetable.

Other issues included:

- The balance of programming which for some was ‘top heavy’ – i.e., keynotes clustered into Day 1. A future programme might introduce keynotes at different times across the 3 days, enabling digital attendees to plug in at key moments and integrate participation more effectively with their other commitments.
- The need for greater diversity. While the balance of women to men was genuinely progressive, voices from ethnic minorities were missing and LGBTQ+ issues relating to culture, healing and care were under-explored. This is a major gap in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion of CoMuseum. It is also a significant issue given that minority voices, inclusion and diversity were regularly discussed, but such diversity was absent from the speakers and audience profile.

## 4. Learning Points – a Future CoMuseum

CoMuseum 2022 was a major moment in museum and cultural strategy and practice as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and re-evaluate every area of sector development. It offered an ambitious programme of real quality and explored in depth one of the most pressing global challenges: healing, care and, more broadly, health and the role of culture in driving impact.

CoMuseum has become a trusted brand for museums and the wider cultural sector, recognised for its convening role, choice of high-quality speakers, and its gift for engaging with the most important issues (challenges and opportunities) of the time. Increasingly, CoMuseum is also seen as a guide to the future of museums – with a growing track record of exploring innovation and exploring new horizons.

This evaluation has unlocked significant positive perceptions toward CoMuseum as a go-to platform and meeting place for museum and cultural professionals. The multi-level approach to programming, combining different types of session, from the high-level plenary address to the interactive Co-Lab, also invites different types of participants and a more nuanced and textured experience than some other events.

The international dimension of CoMuseum is also recognised as a core strength, as is its embeddedness in Greece, which gives the event a distinctive cultural energy and shines a light on museum innovation.



*Closing Remarks with Dr Tom Fleming, Director, Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy | Expert on Creative Economy, Cultural and Arts Policy (UK), Dr Sophia Handaka, CoMuseum Host, Curator of World Cultures, Benaki Museum (GR) and Adam Rozan, Museum Professional, CoMuseum International Advisory Committee Member (U.S.).*

The CoMuseum conference, is also increasingly recognised as a resource hub for museums and culture – through its archives and the exemplary way it records sessions, provides a digital footprint to the event, and engages the sector over the course of each year through email and social media.

These assets underpinned by a very professional, dynamic and open team, which is genuinely passionate about the topic(s) and imbues the event with a spirit of generosity and togetherness, also point to a positive future. CoMuseum can continue to flourish as one of the major platforms and events for museum innovation globally and internationally, while retaining its qualities as a flagship for Greece and the EU.

The survey for CoMuseum 2022 pointed to a set of priority discovery areas which could provide a focus for future editions of CoMuseum. These include:

- **A big push on diversity and inclusion** - including a focus on museums and the LGBTQ+ communities. However, to be authentic and organic and not tokenistic.
- **The relationship between museums and artists** - linking heritage, collections, and contemporary practice – including a focus on the role and status of artists in terms of freedom of expression and artists' welfare and rights.



- **The role of museums in pioneering new narratives for decolonisation** and in particular on championing the voice and rights of indigenous communities affected by cultural appropriation and / or displaced by climate crisis and war.
- **Concepts of mobility, time and speed** - in a digital age and an era where climate crisis requires a reappraisal of travel and international practice.
- **Inter-regional collaboration and exchange**, especially between museums in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is to unpack notions of the role and value of museums and scope for different models of innovation. It is also to go beyond the 'north / south' paradigm where the north is viewed as delivering expertise, toward a model based on criticality and mutuality.
- **Museums as a hyper-local resource and catalyst for renewal and sustainable place-making** – e.g., their role in the 'fifteen minute city' in a new type of urbanism - as hubs for community, and as safe spaces for cultural expression and practice.
- **Practical toolkits and best practice guides** – e.g., on ethics, intellectual property and environmental sustainability.
- **Museums as agents for social change** – e.g., focusing on global issues such as migration, conflict, poverty and climate crisis to drive innovation into the next generation of museum planning.
- **Museums and the next digital frontier** – e.g., how the metaverse and wider applications of extended reality will require new models if museums are to continue to drive impact in areas such as care and healing.

- **The death and life of museums:** how they need to be totally re-imagined for museums to play a long-term role in sustainable development. This will require some of the older models and approaches to die and for new ones to be born.

**CoMuseum 2022, with its focus on healing and care, provided a much-valued package of discussions, exchanges and experiences which helped museum and cultural professionals to reorientate and thus recover some ground in what continues to be a deeply challenging and uncertain time. The event balanced talk of challenges with those of opportunities, it looked in-depth at some of the genuinely innovative practices underway in different types of museums, and it began to shape a future where museums can play a foundational role for a healthier society.**

**CoMuseum 2023 can build from this, refining its hybrid model and leveraging the CoMuseum brand - with its international context - and the expertise that guides it to deliver another inspirational event that mobilises exchange and gives confidence to museum professionals as they seek to make a positive difference.**

**A future CoMuseum can be a beacon of collaborative exchange and co-design on new models for museums as catalysts for renewal and anchors of civic development. CoMuseum can, theme by theme and year by year, address the big issues facing society and the role of museums in facilitating dialogue on such issues.**

**To deliver this, will involve increased levels of interaction in shaping themes and in identifying ways to deliver meaningful dialogue. The balance of digital and in person activity, the relationship between museum development and the wider cultural policy landscape, and the link between constant development themes (such as on openness and inclusion) and emergent or ‘trending’ themes (such as the role of artificial intelligence or 15’-minute cities), will need to be made with care and expertise.**

# Appendix

## ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Lead Coordinator

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Curator of World Cultures, Benaki Museum

Eleni Alexaki,  
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Public Diplomacy Section, U.S. Embassy Athens

Maria Papaioannou,  
Head of Arts Greece & Regional Lead Museums Revisited  
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Katerina Gkoutziouli,  
CoMuseum Project Manager

Chrysoula Melidou,  
British Council

Ioanna Koutsounanou,  
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## INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Director of Programs and Audience Development, Smithsonian National Museum of American History

## INFORMATION

Website: <https://thecomuseum.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/thecomuseum>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/thecomuseum/>

Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/thecomuseum/>

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

You can watch the CoMuseum 2023 conference on the official CoMuseum's [YouTube channel](#)

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This Evaluation report has been produced by [Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy](#):  
leading international consultancy for culture and the creative economy.

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