

**Participation in cultural life – a tool for community well-being.  
How can history have a present and a future?  
A case study from the Galati Museum of Christian History, Culture and Spirituality  
from the Lower Danube**

**Cosmin ILIE, Dimitrie STOICA\***

“Dunărea de Jos” University of Galati (Romania)

\*Corresponding author: dimitrie.stoica@ugal.ro

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**Abstract**

Participation in cultural life is fundamental to sustainable education. The appreciation of culture is fostered both in schools and through the most prominent cultural institutions, especially museums. The role of museums is evolving daily. Once seen solely as places for safeguarding cultural assets, today they serve a wider purpose: educational, social, community, economic, democratic, and particularly participatory. Therefore, museum organisations, aiming to meet diverse public expectations, are becoming increasingly complex entities that demand effective and transparent management. To illustrate this, the research presents a study-synthesis of ten years of the Museum of Christian History, Culture and Spirituality from the Lower Danube.

**Keywords:** culture, education, museum, community value

**Introduction**

From simple collections and cabinets of curiosities to today's multidisciplinary institutions, museums have been part of human life since antiquity. Findlen (1989, 61) shows that the word's etymology comes from the Latin term "museum," derived from the ancient Greek "mouseion," which meant "space for science and art" or "temple of the muses." In Romanian, the word "museum" first appears, according to Opriş (2008, 126), in 1717, mentioned by Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, with the meaning of "pantries that house historical values useful for education." Recent research coordinated by Vasile (2022, 10) indicates that the modern concept of a museum emerged in the 18th century, modelled on the Louvre Museum—a space created to exhibit a nation's most important achievements. The 20th century saw a territorial expansion of museums and a move towards specialising by collection type, and in the 21st century, the museum has become a professionalised, complex, and multidisciplinary institution with a triple role: 1. Protecting heritage; 2. Social responsibility; and 3.

Educational mission, with an increasingly discussed additional role—namely, the economic one—in which the museum is viewed as a catalyst for economic development.

The core purpose of any museum-like organisation has always been to provide visitors with insight into the cultural, historical, artistic, and spiritual development, whether specific to a community or universal. His Holiness Prof. Dr Casian, Archbishop of the Lower Danube, demonstrates that a museum is primarily a Cathedral of personalised memory, immortalised history, and preserved documents and books that are not consumed by the “teeth” of time (Casian 2021, 3). Objects and works of historical, artistic, and documentary significance are selected and displayed to showcase the unparalleled treasure left to us by our ancestors. This treasure honours us but also places responsibility on us. To remain grounded in reality, this mission must transcend the traditional activities of museums (conservation, restoration, protection, and exhibition of heritage objects) towards a broader set of responsibilities: cultural, economic, social, and innovative. Museums can no longer be viewed simply as buildings or institutions housing valuable objects. The modern museum is an active form of “relationship from person to person, synchronically and especially diachronically” through “cultural goods transmitted from one person to another” (Casian 2021, 3), and subsequently to the community. Therefore, the museum becomes a “modus vivendi” in “secular, virtual and globalising contemporary life” (Casian 2021, 4), serving as a repository of community history and tradition. Although these aspects may seem initially outside the traditional scope, they are, in fact, the levers that can increase the visibility and significance of the museum, its collections, and its activities, transforming them into valuable cultural resources (Vasile 2022, 10), on equal footing with any other resources for which people compete.

The cultural space of Galati is no exception, an area rich in history, culture, and spirituality, further enhanced by its remarkable economic potential, driven by its geostrategic location and increasingly well-developed infrastructure. Among the cultural institutions that consistently strive to contribute to the educational, cultural, social, and, last but not least, economic "added value" of the community, through a significant contribution to the development of the creative and recreational sector, the new museum in the municipality of Galati plays a prominent role. Established in 2014, the Museum of Christian History, Culture, and Spirituality from the Lower Danube has become a landmark institution for promoting the region's cultural identity.

## **Materials and methods**

### ***Materials***

To highlight the museum's contribution to community well-being, data were collected from multiple sources, including institutional reports (2015-2024), national statistics on cultural participation, and the authors' direct observations.

### ***Methods***

This paper employs a descriptive case study approach focusing on the Museum of Christian History, Culture and Spirituality from the Lower Danube (Galati, Romania).

## **Results and discussion**

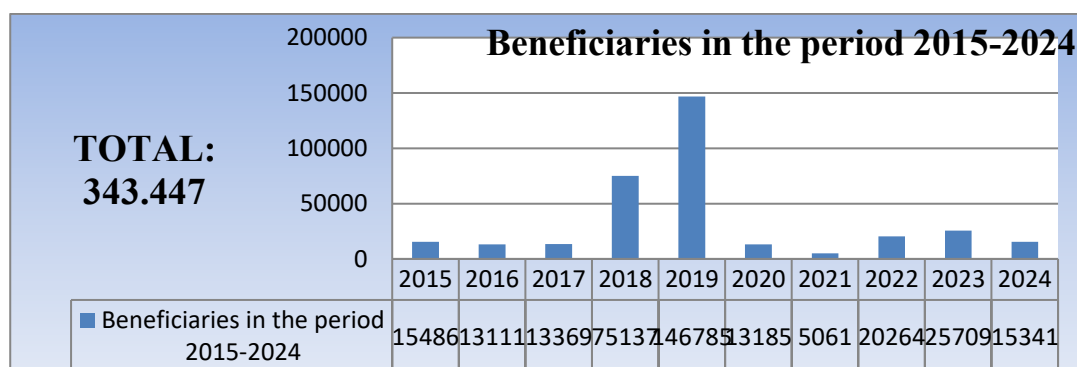
### ***Attendance and community participation***

On November 27, 2024, it marked 10 years since the cultural institution's inauguration, and on February 2, 2025, it was 10 years since its official opening to the public. From the

beginning until today, over these 10 years of operation, the museum has enhanced its collections, exhibition tours, community dialogue, and, above all, its public activities by diversifying the cultural products and services it provides. Notable measures have also been implemented to raise the profile of the museum, from local to regional levels, aiming for national recognition through its heritage, dedicated exhibition spaces for the promotion of cultural assets, restoration laboratories, and most importantly, through its extensive activity involving the public/community. The primary beneficiaries of these efforts are young people of all ages, engaged in interactive activities, scientific sessions, exhibition projects, concerts, recitals, creative workshops, film screenings, and many more.

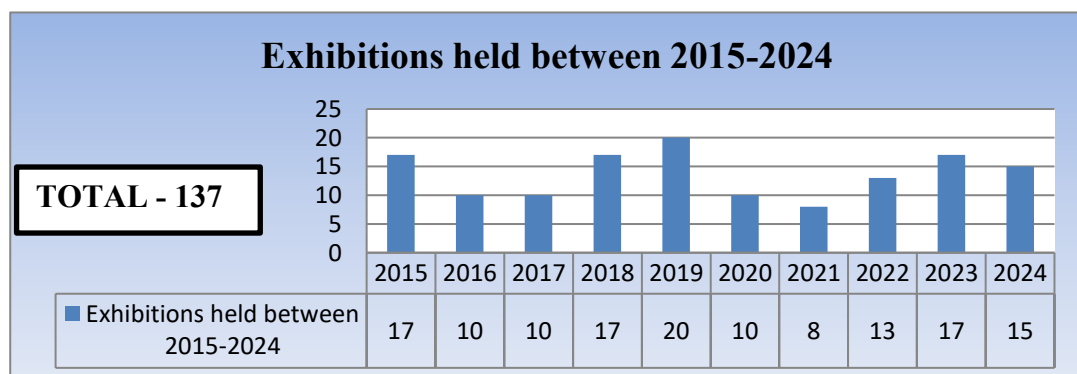
The main building of the museum, which today houses the permanent exhibition, the old book depository, and several administrative offices, is an architectural treasure and a historic monument emblematic of Galati. Built between 1898 and 1901 under the guidance of Bishop Partenie Clinceni (1847-1910), this palace—a true symbol of modern Galati, renowned for its elegance and beauty—served a triple purpose: as administrative headquarters, episcopal residence, and royal residence. Guest rooms, a hall, bedrooms, salons, and a ceremonial hall were permanently reserved for the Royal Family (Casian 2017, 5). After its wrongful confiscation in 1963, it served various functions and, from 1967 onwards, housed the country's first contemporary art museum. In 2004, the building was returned to its rightful owner—the Archdiocese of the Lower Danube. Between 2012 and 2014, it underwent extensive rehabilitation, conservation, and restoration, preparing it to host the new museum institution—the Museum of Christian History, Culture, and Spirituality of the Lower Danube. Over the years, numerous notable figures have visited the diocesan museum: King Ferdinand and Queen Maria, Dimitrie Sturdza, Spiru Haret, as well as many other secular and ecclesiastical personalities, cultural figures, prominent representatives of prestigious institutions, and local, national, and international authorities.

Given that the inauguration of the Episcopal Palace in 1901 marked an unforgettable historical event, with a notable assembly of church and lay figures present in Galati on September 8, 1901, the completion of the extensive project of consolidating, restoring, and enhancing the building's extraordinary potential—by establishing the new diocesan museum—could not have been left to chance. Therefore, under the special care of His Holiness Casian, Archbishop of the Lower Danube, the emblematic building was inaugurated and consecrated by His Holiness Father Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, on November 27, 2014. The building, freed from the mists of history and restored to its original splendour, was surrounded by an impressive council of hierarchs and supported in prayer by prominent figures from the Galati community, as well as notable representatives of several local, national, and international cultural institutions. The event received extensive coverage in both local and national media. From the inaugural moment in 2014 to February 2025, the total number of beneficiaries receiving free services and cultural items from the Galati museum, supported financially by the Archdiocese of the Lower Danube, has surpassed 344,000. According to Figure 1, the pivotal year was 2019.



**Figure 1.** Beneficiaries of museum services 2015-2024  
Source: Museum activity reports and the author's own contribution

Perhaps this milestone is not a high-performance indicator for a museum's 10 years of activity in a city with rich tourism (e.g., Bucharest, Iasi, Sibiu, Brasov, Sinaia). However, for Galati, a city with high tourist potential that is not fully exploited, it is significant. Among the numerous projects to enhance the city's own heritage, it is important to mention the travelling exhibition project, which also generated the largest number of beneficiaries: Christian Spirituality on the Lower Danube. The contribution of church prints to the development of Romanian culture and language. The exhibition approach began in 2019, in partnership with the Brukenthal National Museum and the Octavian Smighelschi Painter Association, and was a real success. The results were due to an exceptional selection of objects, the fluency of the exhibition, the message conveyed, and, last but not least, the itinerary in cultural spaces recognised nationally and internationally, with a large flow of visitors: Bucharest, Mogoşoaia, Sibiu, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Oradea, and Alba-Iulia. The exhibition generated a record number of visitors in a calendar year – 126,735 – similar to that at the headquarters during 2015-2019. Also, other events that attract large numbers of participants include the Night of Museums and the Night of European Researchers. Annually, at the Night of Museums, the consistent programs that include openings, concerts, recitals, interactive activities, fairs and other surprises, attract an average of 3 - 4000 people in a 6-hour time frame, from 18:00 to 00:00. Regarding temporary exhibitions, according to Figure 2, an average of 14-15 temporary exhibitions were organized annually, the total number for the period 2015 - 2024 being 137.



**Figure 2.** Temporary exhibitions created/hosted in the period 2015-2024

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Source: Museum activity reports and the author's own contribution

Although a selection of these is difficult to make, because each cultural event has its own imprint, waiting to be discovered and appropriately capitalized, we will still try to mention some of the successful projects, either initiated by the museum or hosted in the exhibition spaces at the headquarters or in other alternative spaces, such as the "Hall of Lost Steps" at the "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati or the foyer of the "Nae Leonard" National Opera and Operetta Theater:

**2015:** *Brâncoveanu 300 - The tradition continues; Cela Neamtu - the lady of Romanian tapestry; Iordăchescu Method - for translating monuments and buildings; Panaite Chifu - Mystikosmidea; Childhood and joy - toy exhibition; Garden with angels - plastic artist Silvia Radu; Titanic - plastic artist Florian Doru Crihana; Living Icon; Art and Ceremonial at royal tables;*

**2016:** *In memoriam Sergiu Dumitrescu; Childhood and joy; Art from the trenches. The Trench Art Phenomenon: Garden with angels - plastic artist Silvia Radu;*

**2017:** *Titanic - plastic artist Florian Doru Crihană; Graphics in a private collection - collector Vasile Joanta; Art and Ceremonial at royal tables;*

**2018:** *The Great Union. From the victory in the First World War to the coronation of the sovereigns of Greater Romania, Painted eggs. From symbolism to craft; Octavian Smigelschi – promoter of Unity and National Art; Banat Heritage; Queen Maria. Queen Soldier: A royal friendship. Grigore Antipa and the kings of Romania: 1892-1944;*

**2019:** *Childhood memories. Games and toys for children: 1930 – 1980, Re: Resonance - Japanese pictorial art, Mir and borangic - plastic artist Camelia Ionescu Popa; Ethnic mosaic in the village world, Spatial conquests; Fluent spaces - Maps of the Danube space 1650 - 1800; In the light of culture - The work of Anghel Saligny, Treasury - Diocese of Tulci; Bohol - corner of Heaven - collector Vasile Joanta;*

**2020:** *Space Conquests; Maria of Romania. Queen and Artist; Take Romanian!; Fluent Spaces - Maps of the Danube Space 1650 – 1800;*

**2021:** *In the Light of Culture - The Work of Anghel Saligny; Treasure - Diocese of Tulca; Apostolate on the Lower Danube;*

**2022:** *From soul to soul - plastic artist arch. Dan Mihai Vucicovici; Light. Color. Prayer - Union of Plastic Artists, Galati Branch; Sacred and profane in graphics of the 15th-19th centuries, collector av. George Șerban; The Royal Family of Romania; Kabuki - Japanese Prints, collector av. George Șerban; Living Human Treasure. Florin Poenariu. An icon of Laz; Coronation of the Sovereigns of Greater Romania, Queen Maria and King Ferdinand, in Alba Iulia (1922-2022);*

**2023:** *Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu; Radu Macovei and Grigore Lazarovici - pillars of journalism and cultural life in Galati; Portraits - paintings, sketches and graphics, collector Vasile Joanta; Dimitrie Cantemir: Prince between East and West - Imprints of history, music and culture; Prayer books - alphabets of faith and bread for the soul; Apostolate in the Lower Danube (2nd edition); Prayer and communion;*

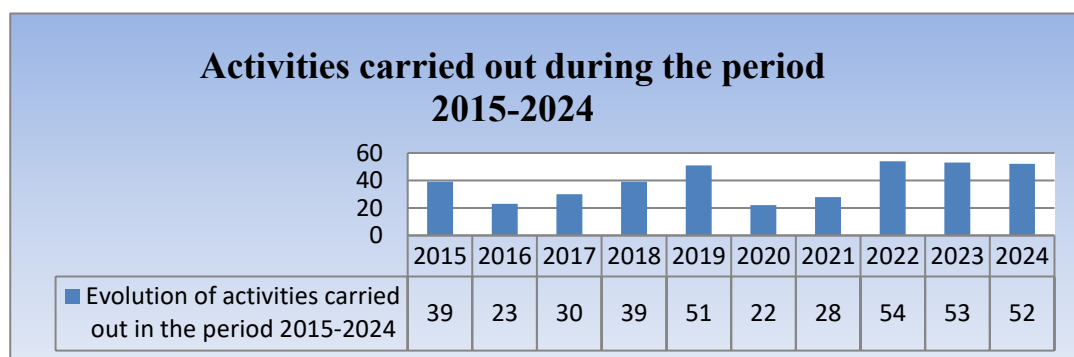
**2024:** *Prayer and Healing; 10 years of restoration within the laboratories of the Diocesan Museum; Traditional house interior; Continuation – plastic artist Diana Melnic; Bridge of merciful love over the water disaster; Prison UNIVERSES: the poetry of*

*communist prisons; The Bible, Fountain of Wisdom!; Christian inscriptions in monetary issues (4th – 21st centuries); Apostolate in the Lower Danube (3rd edition).*

### ***Exhibitions and educational programs***

The museum has also organised and hosted numerous scientific sessions of both national and international importance. The most notable event for this institution is the Scientific Communications Session Restitutio Es. The Art of Restoration, now in its sixth edition, is organised in partnership with ‘Dunarea de Jos’ University of Galați and the Association of Conservators and Restorers of Romania. The sixth edition gathered a significant number of specialists in heritage conservation and restoration in Galați, who presented 104 scientific communications. Additionally, many publications have been produced on specific exhibition projects or research in the field, such as leaflets, brochures, and catalogues, to promote the museum’s heritage and its temporary exhibitions. Among these, the most important scientific publication is *Ars Cristiana Rediviva* – a specialised journal that publishes the papers presented at the Restitutio Es scientific session (a total of 104 articles across six editions).

As a young institution founded in 2024 and accredited by the Ministry of Culture in 2016 through Ministerial Order no. 3958, a significant part of the energy of everyone involved in the museum’s activities has been focused on ensuring competitive visibility both locally and in the wider community, as well as at the national and international levels. Therefore, in addition to traditional museum activities, it has coordinated and hosted numerous cultural, artistic, and educational programmes designed to attract more visitors and promote its activities in unconventional spaces provided by partners. Among these initiatives, several have explored audio-based storytelling, including musical recitals, guided narratives, and ambient soundscapes accompanying exhibitions, thereby further supporting the museum’s educational mission through emotional engagement and cognitive retention (Bubaris, 395-398). As shown in Figure 3 below, the total number of these activities over ten years is 391.



**Figure 3.** Major impact activities carried out in the period 2015-2024

Source: Museum activity reports and the author’s own contribution

The main goal of this effort, supported by the entire team, is, as mentioned earlier, visibility—the desire to make the institution’s existence and the importance of its displayed and hosted heritage known to both local and national communities. It also aims to raise awareness of the benefits of active and healthy engagement in cultural life. As His Eminence

Prof. Dr Casian, Archbishop of the Lower Danube, reminds us, a quality cultural act does more than simply inspire admiration; it acts as a tool that helps us deepen and discover the inner, purifying, and transfiguring meaning of art for humans (Casian 2022, 6). It allows us to escape the dullness of everyday life by contemplating the Beautiful through and from art, which can only come from the Creator of the world. Therefore, contemplating art becomes contemplating God; the encounter with and relationship to art and the artistic act become a communion with God; and the appreciation and promotion of art become acts of human gratitude for the gifts bestowed by the Creator upon His creation.

Regarding participation in cultural life, there is generally a downward trend at the national level. The factors are varied, but they are not the focus of our research. Instead, to understand the phenomenon, we will present data from a recent study (ILIE, 2025) that compared the years 2018-2023 on the subject. A clear picture of participation in cultural life is provided by data collected and published in the annual reports of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the National Institute for Cultural Research and Training (NICRT) through the Cultural Barometer. Accordingly, in 2018, 56% of respondents to the study (National Institute for Cultural Research and Training 2019, 63) answered NEVER when asked whether they had participated in any kind of cultural event in the last year; 62% answered the same for visiting a museum or art gallery, 61% for watching a film at the cinema, 52% for visiting a historical monument or archaeological site and 76% for reading or borrowing books from the library. Table 1 shows that 4% of the population participates in cultural life weekly through the general category “cultural events”. Consequently, only 4% of the population frequently participates in events of this kind. Additionally, the data above indicate that 44% of respondents participated in a cultural event at least once a year, which represents the highest figure for the period studied.

**Table 1.** Frequency of participation in cultural activities in 2018.

In the last 12 months, how often...	Weekly	Monthly	Several times a year or less	Never	Total	Number of people interviewed
...did you go to the cinema?	2%	11%	26%	61%	100%	1215
...did you go to cultural events?	4%	10%	30%	56%	100%	1215
...did you go to a public library to read or borrow books?	2%	5%	17%	76%	100%	1214
...did you visit a historical monument or archaeological site?	2%	7%	39%	52%	100%	1216

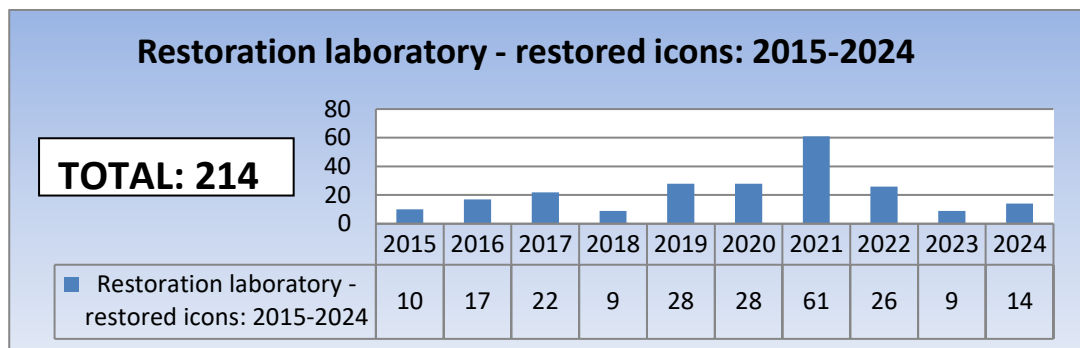
<b>...did you visit a museum, of any type, or an art gallery?</b>	1%	5%	32%	62%	100%	1212
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Source: adapted from Cultural Barometer (NICRT, 2019)

According to data from 2019 (National Institute for Cultural Research and Training 2020, 47), the list of cultural practices with a frequency of NEVER is led by “going to the library, to read or borrow books,” with 82%, followed by: “club/disco” at 77%, “theatre” at 73% (up six percentage points from 2018), “sports competitions” as a spectator at 66%, and “cinema” at 66% (Table 1). From this, we infer that 2019, characterised by abundant events and active participation in cultural life, above the multiannual average of nearly 42%, recorded a 38% participation rate in museum and art gallery activities, representing respondents who engaged in such activities at least once a year, 4 percentage points below the overall trend. A sharp decline occurred in 2020 and 2021. Participation in cultural activities fell from 44% in 2018 (National Institute of Statistics, 2019) to 7.8% in 2020 (National Institute of Statistics, 2021) and 10% in 2021 (National Institute of Statistics, 2022), according to the NIS. The measures imposed during the COVID pandemic negatively impacted cultural participation, which began to recover in 2022 when the average participation rate increased to 22% (National Institute of Statistics, 2023). According to NICRT (2023, 52), data from 2022 show that only 30% of respondents attended an event organised by a museum or art gallery at least once annually. The item “visiting a historical monument or archaeological site” recorded the highest participation rate at 59%, possibly reflecting consumers’ desire to partake in outdoor activities, particularly after the travel restrictions imposed in 2020-2021. Meanwhile, the number of people visiting museums, galleries, and art exhibitions continued to decline compared to 2019 (by 8%), the year before globally impactful events such as pandemics and conflicts. This suggests overall participation remains relatively low. The year 2023 saw a return to the upward trend of 2019, with participation in cultural events organised by museums and galleries reaching 45% (National Institute for Cultural Research and Training 2024, 36). Despite this improvement, high-frequency participation still accounts for only 4% of the total, meaning that 96% of potential participants remain unconvinced.

The activities proposed by the diocesan museum for current and potential beneficiaries include visiting permanent and temporary exhibitions, symposiums and scientific events, book launches, watching documentary films, concerts, recitals, painting and restoration workshops, various creative and recreational activities in the Episcopal Palace Garden, awareness-raising actions on environmental protection and social community responsibility, and more. The museum also has a cultural goods conservation-restoration laboratory specialising in the conservation-restoration of old books, wood and polychrome wood paintings, metal objects, and movable cultural goods. The laboratory’s work was recognised by the National Commission of Museums and Collections through Operating Authorisation no. 101 of 26.11.2020.

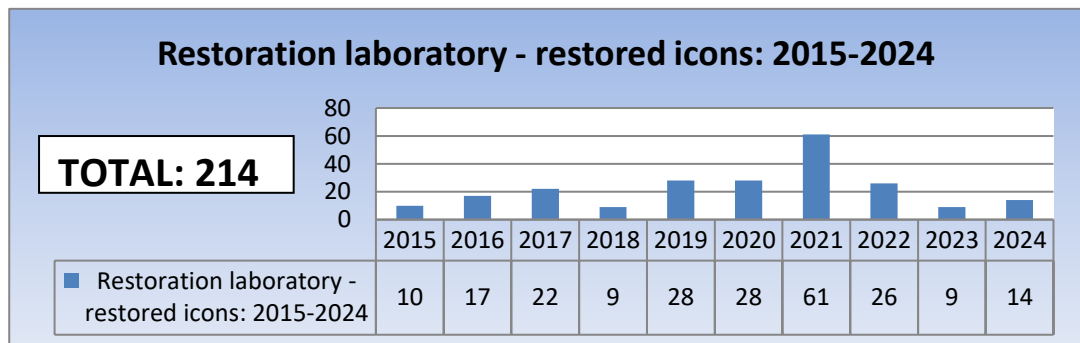




**Figure 4.** Number of volumes - old books restored in the period 2015-2024

Source: Museum activity reports and the author's own contribution

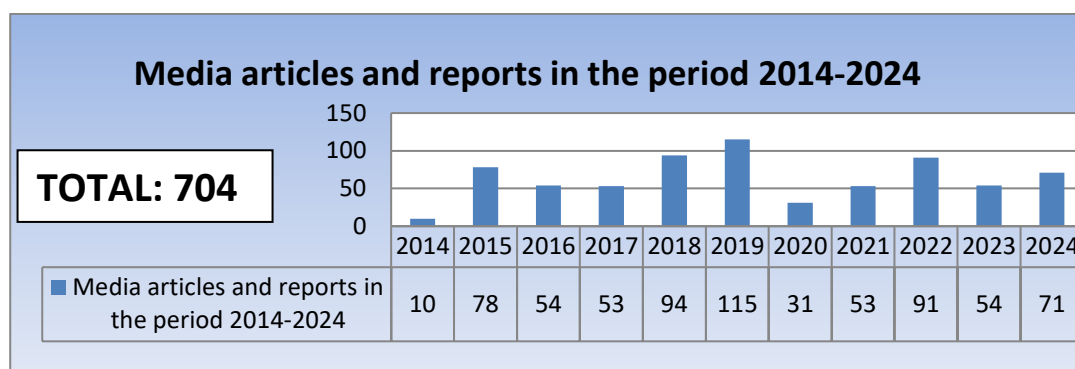
Figures 4 and 5 provide an overview of the activities carried out over ten years at the Museum of Christian History, Culture and Spirituality from the Lower Danube. Among the two main categories of restored objects, there are 260 items, comprising 46 book volumes and 214 icons on wooden supports. Additionally, other cultural assets in the polychrome wood and metal category have received the necessary "care, treatment and medication" for "recovery," as the restorer acts like a doctor who, with a scalpel in hand and an ever-expanding knowledge base, operates and preserves the lives of these cultural assets.



**Figure 5.** Number of icons restored in the period 2015-2024

Source: Museum activity reports and the author's own contribution

All these activities were covered in the local and national press, totalling 704 articles and Reports, as shown in Figure 6, indicating an average of approximately 70 media appearances. annually.



**Figure 6.** Number of articles and reports in the period 2014-2024  
Source: Museum activity reports and the author's own contribution

Overall, the data demonstrate the museum's active role in promoting cultural education and heritage preservation, both through restoration work and public outreach activities. Over the past decade, the increasing number of projects and media reports confirms the institution's dedication to enhancing community engagement at both local and national levels.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the activity with the public accounts for only a small percentage of the museum's overall work, as the primary role of such an institution remains the research, conservation, protection, restoration, and promotion of the community's tangible and intangible treasures. Nevertheless, the direct provision of cultural services and products remains the most visible aspect, supported by attention to educational activities and social responsibility within the community. In the case of the Galati museum, ten years of activity may not seem substantial in terms of time, but considering the financial sacrifices made by the Diocesan Centre to support the museum's work—through the ongoing care and protection of His Holiness Father Casian, Archbishop of the Lower Danube—and the daily effort to adapt its message, services, and goods to meet the expectations of the public, visitors, and the community at large, it signifies extraordinary and continuous effort from the entire team, both from the Diocesan Centre of the Lower Danube Archdiocese and the Museum of Christian History, Culture, and Spirituality of the Lower Danube.

Beyond collections, buildings, logos, or brands, the museum's significance arises from the fundamental importance of its people, categorised into two groups: those who build and sustain the museum's heritage by preserving the unaltered memory of Romanian identity or even universal identity (i.e., those who animate the museums), and those who choose to live the museum experience (i.e., beneficiaries who breathe the air of culture and absorb the essence of national and universal consciousness in order to discover new perspectives on life). Therefore, the most valuable resources within and for an institution are its people — the only ones endowed with divine creative capacity, capable of enhancing and expanding the value that cultural institutions are meant to offer the community, fostering educational, social, cultural, and economic well-being.

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