

## Austria

Report by

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### Introduction - Key Issues

Austria considers itself to be a tourist destination, so that the sale of culture, culturally relevant information and visits to cultural institutions are major contributors to the Austrian budget. The regular receipt of statistical material on museums and exhibitions is therefore essential to the interests of both the Austrian government and those of the Austrian Regions, since it allows them to review the level of acceptance of what is on offer, and to plan for future requirements. Museum statistics are treated in Austria as part of the general cultural statistics of the Republic of Austria, whilst the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Austrian Regions and the agencies supporting museums additionally publish their own museum statistics.

The Republic of Austria's cultural statistics, which are collected and published by the Austrian Central Office of Statistics, are general statistics relating to cultural establishments and institutional cultural events. The fundamental differences are neither the result of a general concept of culture nor of an anthropological understanding of culture. The publication does not seek to distinguish high culture from the achievements of everyday culture, or art from the everyday or trivial. What is presented are rather specific achievements from the spheres of art, entertainment and information, with fluid transitions between all spheres which can nowadays generally be designated as the "leisure sector".

Museums and exhibitions are included in a separate subsection entitled "Cultural heritage", which also covers the spheres of "Architectural cultural heritage" and "Libraries".

Since 1998, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been issuing its own annual cultural report, including statistical material, in relation to the national museums administered by the Federal government. This report also deals with the legal questions, which arise from the change of status of museums into scientific establishments in their own legal capacity. The Austrian Regions themselves publish annual cultural reports, which include museum statistics and also information on individual Regional exhibitions. Access to visitor data of privately managed museums remains a problem, since the surveys by the Regions are voluntary, and individual agencies supporting private museums and exhibitions are not prepared, perhaps for tax or other commercial reasons, to provide visitor data. As a result, the data available in Austria in relation to museums is incomplete, although it remains overall readily calculable, and it is possible to derive long-term trends, which permit ongoing assessment of museum operation and museum planning in Austria. The reports that follow are summaries of the meetings 1995-2000.

Unfortunately, however, despite the detailed survey data and their evaluation by the Austrian Central Office of Statistics, no standard data and evaluation criteria exist to date. Data is collected in a whole range of areas; however, with the exception of important basic data such as visitor numbers and possibly museum budgets, it is not comparable. Only museums which are publicly financed or which receive public subsidies are obliged to publish data; however, most of this relates solely to visitor numbers and budget funds. Due to Austria's federal structure, no higher authority exists which would be in a position to draw conclusions from the existing museum statistics, with a view to ongoing planning for the future of the entire Austrian museum system, and this must be seen as a disadvantage within the treatment of Austrian museum statistics. Statistics are therefore of purely general interest, and only local consequences are drawn from them by the individual agencies supporting the institutions.

## Definition of Museum

In Austria, a museum is described, in line with the UNESCO definition, as

*“a permanent, essentially non-profit-making institution, accessible to an indeterminate public, for the custody and exhibition of items of public interest of all kinds, designated ‘exhibits’, intended to foster development and education and to provide entertaining information to visitors.”*

The term “museum” is not, however, subject to legal protection in Austria, so that every person or institution is entitled to set up an establishment for any purpose whatsoever and to call it a "museum".

## Existence of Museum-related Laws

According to the Austrian Constitution, the majority of museums, with the exception of the Federal museums, fall within the jurisdiction of the Region in which they are located. Federal statutes exist only for the Austrian national museums, which, with one exception, fell within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research up to 1995, and subsequently of the Federal Ministry of Education and Culture up to 1998. Only the Heeresgeschichtliche Museum [Museum of Army History] fell within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Defence. At the present time, all the Federal museums fall within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The gradual change of status of the Austrian Federal museums into national scientific establishments with full legal capacity, which was resolved under the Federal Museums Act 1998, and which commenced in 1999 by that of the Kunsthistorisches Museum [Museum of Art History], was followed by that of the Museum für angewandte Kunst [Museum of Applied Art], the Technisches Museum Wien [Vienna Technical Museum], the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere [Austrian Belvedere Gallery] and the Graphische Sammlung Albertina [Albertina Graphic Collection] on 1 January 2000. The Österreichische Nationalbibliothek [Austrian National Library] and the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien [Ludwig Foundation Museum of Modern Art in Vienna] acquired full legal capacity on 1 January 2002. The change of status of the Naturhistorisches Museum [Natural History Museum] on 1 January 2003 has completed full legal capacity of all the Federal museums.

The Austrian Regions have also seen increased endeavours since 2000 to hive off the Regional museums and to allow them to become independent commercial corporations. The museums of the City of Vienna were hived off at the beginning of 2002, and the Regional museums in Styria, Carinthia and Tyrol will become independent over the coming years. Some Regional laws are being passed for this purpose, which regulate the status and sphere of effect of the museums. The organisational form most frequently sought is that of a “scientific public law establishment”.

## Categories used regarding Type of Collection

Standard categorisation and classification is scarcely possible for the Austrian museums. In addition to few special museums and art museums, a large number of regional museums exist, which cover the whole range of information generally offered by museums in relation to art and crafts, folklore, history and geology, for a certain region. Standard categorisation based on the UNESCO proposals is therefore not possible for most of Austria's museums.

## Categories used regarding Type of Ownership

Different forms of ownership apply to museums in Austria:

### *State-owned museums:*

A distinction must be made between museums that are not entirely state-owned and museums of which large parts have been hived off. The latter are managed as private “wissenschaftliche Anstalten öffentlichen Rechts” [*scientific institutions under public law*] having their own constitution. Their legal form is that of an operating company, with the exhibits remaining in state ownership and being made available to the museums for administration, custody and use. Staff have the status either of officials, public servants or private employees of the operating companies.

***Museums of the federal Länder:***

Each of the nine Austrian federal *Länder*[regions] has a *Landesmuseum* [regional museum], some of which are also hived off or are on the point of being so (for their legal forms, see point 1).

***Museums of municipalities, associations and churches:***

Some museums are owned by the public authorities and are financed by them, whilst others are managed as private associations, either with or without private financing. The museums of churches and monasteries are special exceptions, since although they are owned by the church, some are publicly subsidised.

***Private museums and foundations:***

Most Austrian museums are privately owned, most of these being small museums, primarily in castles, stately homes, historical sites or archaeological and open air museums, many of which are run for profit. In the interests of the economy as a whole and of tourism however, these museums also receive public funding via a system of promotions and subsidies. These private museums also include important museums that have evolved out of private collections or that receive corporate financing, most of which are administered as foundations.

It is important to note that although the museums and the owners of exhibits are able to independently dispose of items within collections, they are subject to the supervision of the *Österreichisches Bundesdenkmalamt* [*Austrian Federal Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments*] for the purposes of anything related to conservation, sale or export.

**Existing Data - Basic Figures and Diagrams**

The following data and diagrams are based on the last two comprehensive sets of cultural statistics published for Austria (1999 cultural statistics, 2000 cultural report). The annual overall number of visits of a total of around 2,400 museums and exhibitions in Austria was between 21.7 million (1992) and 23.7 million visitors over the period 1989 - 1998, whilst visitor numbers fell to 21.6 million visitors in 1999. This equates to 267 annual museum and exhibition visits for every 100 inhabitants.

Broken down by Regions, the national capital Vienna saw the largest number of visitors (9.5 million, a 44.0% share), followed by Salzburg with 3.6 million (16.6%) and Lower Austria with 2.2 million (10.4%). These Regions account for 71.0% of all visits within Austria as a whole. Salzburg and Vienna attracted disproportionate numbers of visitors in relation to their respective shares of the population, whilst otherwise only Carinthia, with 8.3%, attracted a higher proportion than its total population (7.0%). Amongst the individual institutions, the Austrian Federal museums saw the largest proportion of visitors in 1999 (3.2 million), followed by the museums and exhibitions of the individual Regions, with 2.1 million visitors. City museums recorded a total of 1.2 million visitors in 1999, the main proportion of whom visited museums within Vienna. Other museums, which in Austria include museums in churches, castles, fortresses, monasteries etc., reported visitor numbers of 6.25 million.

Payment statistics, where known, indicate 8.1 million fully-paying visitors (39.5%), 5.8 million concessionary visitors (24.9%) and 3.6 million free visitors (17.5%). The payment status of 3.7 million visitors was not recorded.

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