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Virtual exhibition formats in the promotion of Ukrainian visual art

Abstract. The aim of this study was to analyse the evolution of forms of representation of Ukrainian visual art in the context of the integration of digital platforms and immersive technologies into museum practice. The study focused on identifying how VR, AR, WebXR, multimedia interfaces and 3D reconstructions have reshaped the communicative contours of the artistic space, influenced the user's cognitive and emotional experience, and generated new models of audience interaction with artistic artefacts. The research methodology was based on a synthesis of cultural, comparative, structural-functional and historical-logical approaches, which enabled the reconstruction of multiplex connections between technological innovations, aesthetic transformations and ethical imperatives in the process of virtualising exhibition practices. This methodological focus made it possible to trace how digital environments shape cognitive and sensory models of perception of a work of art, as well as how they transform traditional schemes of interpretation and aesthetic evaluation. The study analysed the following Ukrainian projects: the virtual tour "Masterpieces of NAMU" by the National Art Museum of Ukraine, the 3D reconstruction of the exhibition "Kola Silvashi", the VR project "War up close", and the exhibition "Ukrainian portrait of the 17th-20th centuries" on the eMuseum.online platform. Furthermore, the functions of AR/VR platforms in shaping an interactive, adaptive user experience were detailed, the characteristics of emotional and cognitive interaction with the virtual environment were identified, and the legal and ethical challenges arising in the context of the digitisation of art objects were systematised. An analytical examination of contemporary virtual exhibitions has shown that digital technologies have become not only a representational tool, but also a catalyst for inclusivity, democratising access and ensuring the preservation of cultural memory. Virtual exhibitions have acquired the status of autonomous, self-sufficient cultural ecosystems, complementing physical museum infrastructure and ensuring uninterrupted access to content regardless of geographical, temporal and socio-economic constraints. The development of these formats has become crucial for generating new strategies in museum communication, has contributed to the international representation of Ukrainian art, and has laid the groundwork for improving ethical, technological and methodological standards in digital cultural heritage

Keywords: virtual exhibitions; digital cultural ecosystem; VR/AR platforms; Web Extended Reality; 3D representation; Ukraine's artistic heritage

Introduction

Contemporary Ukrainian society is undergoing a rapid digital transformation that encompasses not only the economic and social spheres, but also culture – in particular, the visual art. The growing role of the internet, mobile technologies, and augmented and virtual reality platforms is creating a new exhibition space in which

traditional forms of art exhibitions are being supplemented or replaced by virtual formats. In this context, virtual exhibition formats serve not merely as a tool for displaying artworks, but as a vital link in cultural communication – a means of accessing, engaging with and interpreting art on both a global and local scale.

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Research by K. Liang & L. Kornyska (2025) showed that, as of 2025, there was no full understanding of the role of virtual galleries in the presentation of art and their long-term sustainability.

Between 2020 and 2025, virtual exhibition formats increasingly gained significance as a powerful means of promoting Ukrainian visual art. In particular, O. Lenivenko & O. Sydorenko (2023) emphasised that the introduction of virtual 3D galleries using augmented reality technologies creates opportunities for visitors to interact with exhibits. Supporting this view, S. Leontyev *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that digital technologies are significantly transforming the presentation of contemporary Ukrainian art, using the Shevchenko National Reserve as an example, thereby not only broadening access to cultural heritage but also stimulating cultural communication between different categories of visitors. Researcher T. Mironova (2021) explored the potential of virtual and augmented reality in the works of contemporary Ukrainian artists, emphasising the ability of these technologies to create new sensory and emotional experiences, which, in turn, deepened the viewer's interaction with the artwork. Meanwhile, K. Stoykova (2023) expanded on this thesis by analysing the presentation of art in the postmodern information space and emphasising that the interaction between technological solutions and cultural meanings determines the nature of the perception of contemporary art, shaping a specific way of understanding it within society.

One of the central aspects in this field has been the influence of immersive technologies on the perception of art, as detailed by S. Rusakov (2023). The author emphasised that the use of VR and AR allows for a deeper immersion in the exhibition space, which stimulates visitors' emotional responses and facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of artistic content. Researcher S. Batsenko (2021) examined the theoretical foundations of immersive environments, demonstrating that the integration of VR/AR into artistic practices opens up new horizons for the creation of interactive experiences and the development of innovative methods of communication in the cultural sphere. V. Volynets (2021) emphasised that the integration of virtual and augmented reality into art significantly increases the accessibility of cultural products and helps to expand the audience, which is an important aspect of the democratisation of cultural content. Furthermore, R.A. Widjono (2020) investigated the user experience in virtual galleries and demonstrated that digital formats not only improve the process of learning and assimilating artistic material but also stimulate a deeper and more conscious perception of works of art. An analysis of multimedia gallery design processes conducted by E.A. Sharji *et al.* (2023) led to the conclusion that a well-designed interface and structured content layout are critical for attracting and retaining visitors' attention, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of cultural communication.

Thus, a review of contemporary research has shown that virtual exhibition formats serve not only as a tool for promoting Ukrainian art, but also as a mechanism for creating an interactive and emotionally rich experience for viewers. They foster a deeper understanding of artistic content, shape new cultural discourses and open up additional opportunities for disseminating Ukrainian cultural heritage globally. Thus, the integration of digital technologies into artistic practices not only changes the way works of art are perceived but also stimulates the development of new methodologies for cultural communication and education. The aim of this article was to examine the characteristics of virtual exhibition formats in cultural environment of Ukraine and to assess their impact on the promotion of visual art, particularly on the ways in which artworks are accessed, engaged with and interpreted in the digital environment.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology was based on the integrated application of several academic approaches, which enabled a comprehensive analysis of virtual exhibition formats in the context of promoting Ukrainian visual art. A cultural studies approach was used to examine virtual exhibitions as a phenomenon of contemporary culture, shaping new models of interaction between art and the audience. This was important for determining how the digital environment influences the processes of perception, interpretation and aesthetic evaluation of works of art. A comparative approach was applied to analyse different formats of virtual exhibitions: 3D tours, VR exhibitions, AR enhancements and multimedia galleries. The comparison was carried out according to criteria of interactivity, accessibility, aesthetic quality and communicative effectiveness, which made it possible to identify the advantages and limitations of each format in the context of representing Ukrainian art. A structural-functional approach enabled an analysis of the architecture of virtual exhibition platforms, identify key elements of their organisation (navigation, interface, multimedia content) and determine the functions performed by virtual exhibitions within the system of cultural communication. The historical-logical approach was applied to study the evolution of forms of art representation in the digital environment and to identify trends in the development of virtual exhibition practices in Ukraine, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (since 2022). The empirical basis of the study consisted of virtual projects by leading Ukrainian cultural institutions, selected according to criteria of representativeness, technological diversity and cultural significance. The "Masterpieces of NAMU" 3D tour and the "Ukrainian portrait of the 17th-20th centuries" exhibition by the National Art Museum of Ukraine on the eMuseum.online platform were selected as exemplary cases of the application of three-dimensional visualisation technologies for the representation

of classical Ukrainian painting. The 3D reconstruction of the exhibition “Kola Silvashi” at the M17 Centre for Contemporary Art in 2024 was included as an example of preserving the curatorial vision of a large-scale art event through photogrammetry. The VR project “War up close” (2024–2025) was selected as a unique case of the application of immersive technologies to document the consequences of Russian aggression and shape collective historical memory. The sources of information included materials from international scientific and practical conferences, in particular research data by S. Batsenko (2021) and A. Alfeyorov (2022), as well as official websites of museums and cultural organisations in Ukraine, including the Emuseum portal (n.d.b), the eMuseum online platform (Litvinets *et al.*, 2024; Plishchenko *et al.*, 2025) and the MinCult page (2025), from which data was obtained regarding the number of digitised exhibits, attendance at virtual tours and the technical parameters of the implemented projects.

Results and Discussion

The current trend towards the virtualisation of Ukrainian art exhibitions is creating a convergent space in which technological, cultural and ethical dimensions mutually reinforce one another, forming a new ecosystem for artistic presentation. From a technological perspective, the use of augmented (AR) and virtual (VR) reality not only reinterprets visual space but transforms the ontology of the art object itself, constructing 3D galleries that extend far beyond the boundaries of traditional museum infrastructure. For example, the eMuseum.online platform – a Ukrainian project designed to ensure the digital presence of museums online and provide tools for creating interactive exhibitions – offers users the opportunity to view virtual tours, including of the halls of the National Art Museum of Ukraine, both via a classic web interface and through VR headsets (Litvinets *et al.*, 2024). The virtual exhibitions include 3D models, audio guides, high-quality images of exhibits and even interactive elements, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in cultural heritage without physically being present in the museum.

In the “Masterpieces of NAMU” project – a virtual exhibition of key works from the National Art Museum of Ukraine – users can explore paintings by Oleksandr Murashko, Oleksandr Bohomazov, Oleksandra Exter, David Burliuk and other prominent artists in a digital environment that enables close visual examination, scaling of artworks and navigation through a three-dimensional space (Litvinets *et al.*, 2024). Part of the exhibition is designed for VR viewing, creating a sense of deep presence and “physical” proximity to the works. At the level of virtual space design, the architecture of navigation, the interface, and interaction with the viewer are crucial. This architecture determines how effectively users can “wander” through 3D galleries, switch between rooms, interact with objects, and trigger audio or text descriptions. The design of such environments must take into account

UX/UI elements that ensure intuitiveness, minimal cognitive load and aesthetic appeal. For example, research by Q. He & D. Kosenko (2025) demonstrates how digital technologies in exhibition spaces transform artistry and the visitor experience: the design of multimedia, immersive environments aims not simply to replicate an offline museum, but to create new layers of meaning through interactivity and multimodality.

Immersive technologies change the viewer’s status: they cease to be a passive recipient and are given the role of an active agent who shapes their own experience through navigation, the selection of focal points, and the interpretation of meanings. Such immersion makes it possible to experience an artwork not only visually but also epistemically through what may be described as deep cognitive interaction, in which audiences do not simply observe but construct their own internal narratives and interpretations. In the Ukrainian context, K. Liang & L. Kornyska (2025) point out that, thanks to VR and AR, artistic objects are transformed into “simulacra”: they are no longer static artefacts, but are dynamically interpreted by each viewer depending on their route, choices and experience. In a theoretical sense, such transformations are supported by the research of artists and scholars who analyse the structure of Ukrainian immersive environments. For example, V. Klivak (2022) examines how the design of virtual exhibitions represents space in a way that stimulates educational interaction and aesthetic immersion. The authors noted that the navigational configuration of the halls, transitions between exhibits and visual cues can significantly influence the way in which the viewer constructs meaning. Also, O. Chepelyk (2021) analyses the use of WebXR, Mozilla Hubs and other VR environments by Ukrainian artists: the author demonstrates how virtual spaces with multiple sensory layers (sound, colour, form) encourage experimental thinking, becoming mental “testing grounds” for the creation of new artistic narratives. At the same time, these technological and cultural shifts give rise to ethical dilemmas. The first is the issue of copyright: if artworks are replicated in digital space, does the artist have full control over these copies? Can users alter the composition, scale or navigation of the virtual space, thereby changing the original artistic concept? The second is the issue of privacy: immersive environments often collect data on the user’s movements, gaze direction and reactions (particularly when VR headset sensors are used).

Another ethical consideration is accessibility. Whilst VR galleries have the potential to broaden their audience, they can also create new barriers: not all viewers have access to VR headsets or devices powerful enough to interact effectively with 3D models and immersive spaces. In the Ukrainian context, this issue becomes particularly relevant due to socio-economic imbalances: to make digital culture more inclusive, one of the most practical solutions is the use of AR or WebXR, which

works in a web browser or on mobile devices, but this requires striking a balance between visual quality and performance. Beyond theoretical and ethical considerations, Ukrainian institutions are already actively experimenting with practical applications of virtualisation. For example, eMuseum is a project dedicated to digitising collections, creating 3D models and virtual tours (Emuseum, n.d.b). As part of this project, the “Kola Silvashi” tour, virtual scans of ceramic works, and VR exhibitions dedicated to cultural heritage and historical themes have been realised (Fig. 1).

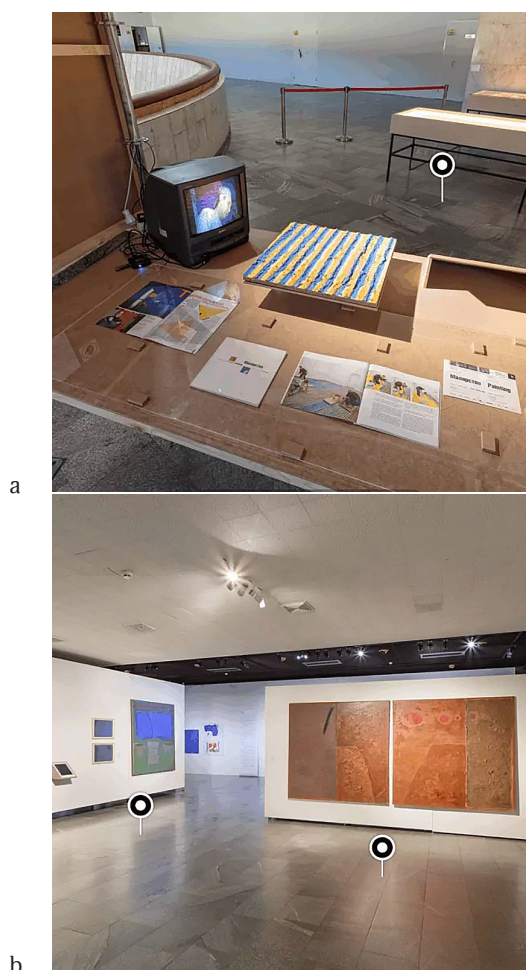


Figure 1. Virtual tour and 3D scanning of exhibits as part of the eMuseum “Kola Silvashi” project

Note: a – virtual tour of the “Kola Silvashi” exhibition galleries, b – 3D scanning of ceramic works. Photo by R. Synhaievskiy
Source: Emuseum (n.d.a)

The creation of the virtual exhibition “Kola Silvashi” demonstrates the potential of digital technologies as a tool for preserving and presenting artistic events in a format that comes as close as possible to the experience of being physically present. The three-dimensional reconstruction, created using photogrammetry and 3D scanning, covers all five floors of the Ukrainian House where the exhibition took place, enabling the

creation of a fully immersive space. Hundreds of captured angles, meticulous architectural modelling and the implementation of an interactive interface enable online visitors to move freely through the exhibition halls, view the works from various distances, access information materials and thus recreate the flow of movement intended by the exhibition’s curator. Recreating the structure of the route, the spatial arrangement of the works, and the integrity of the exhibition concept is particularly important from the perspective of analysing contemporary museum practices, as it allows to grasp the interpretative framework proposed by the exhibition organiser (Plishchenko *et al.*, 2025). A significant aspect of this digital reconstruction is its ability to convey the emotional and atmospheric dimension of the exhibition. At the centre of the artistic concept lies the distinctive colour tone known as “Szilvashi Blue”, which dominates the installation on the ground floor. In the digital version of the exhibition, this colouristic emphasis is preserved with high precision, allowing the online viewer not only to explore the space but also to experience the visual core of the artistic concept. Thus, the three-dimensional model serves not merely as a means of information transmission, but as a fully-fledged aesthetic environment in which the artist’s and curator’s vision is realised.

The digital format, created in accordance with the ICOM International Committee for the Training of Personnel (ICTOP) (1997), is of particular significance for the Ukrainian art context, which operates under conditions of war and the growing risk of losing physical objects. In this case, 3D reconstruction serves to preserve, archive and ensure accessibility – properties that are becoming strategically important for institutional memory and research work. The digitised works of Silvashi and 86 other artists featured in the project are now accessible to students, researchers, curators and a broad international audience (Emuseum, n.d.a). The virtual version of the exhibition serves as an example of how digital solutions can ensure the sustainability of cultural infrastructure. Despite the conclusion of the physical exhibition, its content, aesthetics and educational potential remain accessible in a format that is not subject to geographical or temporal constraints. This transforms the digital exhibition into an autonomous cultural entity that continues to fulfil educational and art-historical functions. The availability of the project in 3D format creates conditions for a broader appreciation of the work of one of the most influential abstract artists in contemporary Ukraine and demonstrates that art can retain its visibility, significance and dynamism even in times of crisis. In this light, the virtual reconstruction of “Kola Silvashi” can be viewed as a conceptual model of a new form of museum communication, in which digital space does not so much replace the physical as complement and extend its existence. It serves as proof that art is capable of taking on new forms

of presence, and that digital tools can be an effective means of preserving cultural memory and ensuring access to it even in the most challenging socio-historical conditions. In May 2025, as part of the celebrations for Europe Day, the National Museum of Ukrainian History added an exhibit to its collection that embodies contemporary trends in the digital representation and documentation of historical events. This is a pair of VR glasses, which were a key tool in the creation and presentation of the internationally renowned virtual project “War Up Close” (Fig. 2).

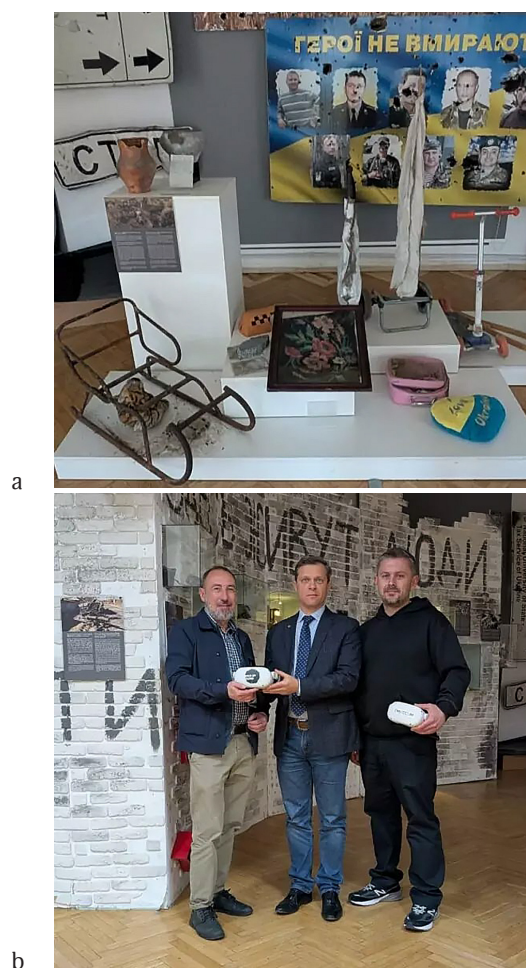


Figure 2. The VR component of the virtual exhibition “War Up Close”, integrated into the permanent exhibition of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine

Source: a – VR content from the exhibition depicting the destruction caused by the war, b – VR headsets on display as a museum exhibit. Photo by M. Omelchenko

Source: Emuseum (n.d.c)

The VR project “War Up Close” (2024-2025) is a unique example of the use of immersive technologies to document and reflect on wartime events. The project features 360-degree panoramas of Ukraine’s devastated cities – Mariupol, Irpin, Bucha and Kharkiv – allowing

viewers to “immerse” themselves in the scene of destruction and feel the scale of the tragedy. Technically, the project is based on high-quality photogrammetry, spherical video recording and processing in 8K format, ensuring maximum detail and realism. A distinctive feature of the project is that the viewer does not simply observe the destruction, but hears the voices of witnesses – recordings of interviews with residents of the occupied territories, military personnel and volunteers. This combination of visual immersion and audio testimonies creates a powerful emotional impact, transforming the virtual exhibition into a tool for preserving historical memory. The project has already been presented at international forums in Brussels, Berlin, Warsaw, Vilnius and Botswana, where it resonated strongly with Western audiences. This project, aimed at documenting and reflecting on the experience of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine (since 2022), uses immersive technologies to provide the viewer with an experience of the events that is as close to reality as possible. The transfer of the VR headsets to the museum was made possible thanks to the collaboration between the non-governmental organisation “eMuseum” and the project’s co-founders, D. Matiash and O. Syvak, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Botswana. The incorporation of VR headsets into the museum’s permanent exhibition has a dual significance. Firstly, it symbolises the expansion of the boundaries of traditional museum practice, where virtual exhibition formats are recognised as fully-fledged carriers of cultural and historical information. Secondly, it demonstrates the willingness of Ukrainian museums to work with innovative technologies, creating new channels of interaction with the audience, particularly young people, who perceive digital forms of representation as natural and intuitive.

Another example of a virtual exhibition is the project “Ukrainian portrait of the 17th-20th centuries” (2023-2024) on the eMuseum.online platform – a large-scale digital reconstruction of one of the most significant exhibitions of the National Art Museum of Ukraine. The exhibition features over 150 portraits spanning from the Cossack era to modernism, including works by T. Shevchenko, I. Repin, M. Boichuk and O. Murashko. The virtual format allows visitors to examine the paintings in detail, with the option to zoom in to the level of brushstrokes, as well as to access in-depth information on the technique, history of creation and biographies of the subjects. Of particular value is the audio guide, narrated by professional actors and art historians, which accompanies the tour of each gallery. An interactive exhibition map allows visitors to choose their own route – chronological, stylistic or thematic – providing a personalised experience for different categories of visitors. The virtual tour recreates this landmark historical exhibition and gives users the opportunity to explore stylistic and temporal changes in art (Fig. 3).

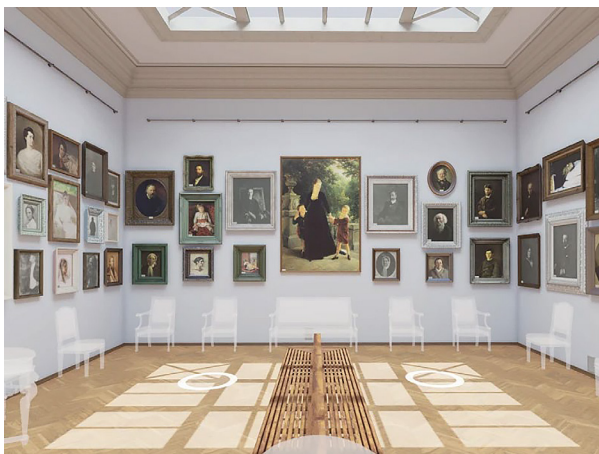


Figure 3. Virtual exhibition “Ukrainian portrait of the 17th-20th centuries”

Note: general view of the virtual gallery displaying the portraits

Source: based on Yu. Litvinets *et al.* (2024)

The exhibition lasts approximately 30 minutes and involves navigating between galleries, zooming in on paintings and audio tours – all of which create a comprehensive digital immersion. From a technological perspective, it is also important to consider the prospects for further development. For example, international researchers propose solutions such as “generous interfaces” – interfaces that place the user’s embodiment at the centre of the experience, encouraging them not only to look but also to “feel” the space, alter its configuration, and create personalised routes (Sharji *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, cultural heritage researchers are focusing on new approaches to 3D modelling. E. Sugiarto *et al.* (2019) presented a system that supplements VR viewing of artefacts with haptic feedback, which significantly enhances sensory perception and the experience of virtual interaction with the object. Overall, the approaches outlined represent a vision of the future where digital reproduction becomes not merely visual but multisensory, and can be adapted for Ukrainian museum practice. However, in practice, the main challenge remains the consolidation of approaches: how to move from sporadic virtual experiments to systematic integration into museum strategies. It is necessary to develop unified standards for 3D modelling (geometry, textures), navigation, and UX/UI templates that take into account different levels of technical accessibility. It is equally important to create metrics for assessing effectiveness: not just the number of views or time spent, but also empirical indicators of engagement (both emotional and cognitive), trust in digital renderings, and the degree of authenticity of the experience.

Thus, the functioning of virtual exhibitions raises questions of communicative effectiveness and engagement: unlike traditional galleries, online audiences can become more active (commenting, interacting, participating in thematic communities), but at the same time

may lose the sense of authenticity or “rituality” of visiting an exhibition. A. Alfeyorov (2022) noted that virtual formats sometimes suffer from a lack of a “ritual” component, which in physical museums or galleries forms an important connection between the artwork, the space and the viewer. Given the complex social and political conditions in Ukraine – in particular, the war, the pandemic, and limited physical access to cultural institutions – virtual exhibitions are becoming not merely an alternative, but a vital means of preserving, documenting and promoting cultural heritage. Digital platforms, 3D tours and virtual tours are already being used as adaptive solutions: they provide access to art collections even when physical spaces are inaccessible (MinCult, 2025). Nevertheless, this role requires further systematic reflection: to what extent such formats are capable of replacing or complementing traditional exhibitions, and what challenges they pose for issues such as preservation, funding and audience engagement.

The virtualisation of exhibition practices raises questions of ethics, copyright, accessibility and inclusivity. The shift to digital formats signifies not only the representation of art, but also a transformation in the ways it is created, disseminated and perceived. From a scientific and theoretical perspective, this raises questions about the model of interaction between the artist, the institution and the viewer: who controls the content, who determines the order of display, how is the authenticity and reliability of digital replicas guaranteed, and how is artistic value preserved in “digital copies”? From a practical perspective, the development of virtual formats for art exhibitions involves key tasks: developing standards for organising virtual exhibition events; implementing analytical methods to assess the engagement and impact of such exhibitions; establishing funding models for virtual galleries; and integrating digital platforms into the overall strategy for cultural management in Ukraine. Although virtual exhibitions have enormous potential – they open up new horizons in access to art, overcome barriers related to geography and crises, offer an interactive experience and promote inclusivity. The lack of uniform standards for the digital representation of artworks means that there are no valid models for assessing the impact of virtual exhibitions on audiences.

R. Parry (2010) conceptualised the digital transformation of museums as a paradigm shift in cultural communication, creating new forms of interaction between the institution and its audience. Researchers S. Sylaiou *et al.* (2010) demonstrated a positive correlation between the sense of presence in a virtual museum and visitor satisfaction levels, confirming the effectiveness of VR technologies in enhancing audience engagement. M. Trunfio & S. Campana (2020) proposed a conceptual model of the visitor experience in mixed reality environments, which can be adapted for Ukrainian museum practices. Research by J.H. Falk & L.D. Dierking (2016) highlighted the importance of contextual factors in the

museum experience, which is particularly relevant for the design of virtual exhibitions in wartime conditions, when the physical context of a visit changes significantly. The systematic review by M.K. Bekele *et al.* (2018) on the application of augmented, virtual and mixed reality technologies for cultural heritage provided a methodological framework for evaluating Ukrainian projects and identifying directions for their further development. Thus, virtual exhibition formats in Ukraine are not merely a technological addition to traditional museums, but a strategic tool for cultural transformation. They open up new avenues of access to heritage, contribute to the formation of contemporary narratives, and enhance educational and social potential, but require systematic reflection, standardisation and an ethical approach.

Conclusions

Research has shown that virtual exhibition formats are becoming one of the key tools for promoting Ukrainian visual art in the current climate. Their significance is growing not only due to technological capabilities, but also because of the public need for accessible cultural content, which is particularly important during Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine (since 2022), when physical exhibition spaces operate with restrictions or become inaccessible. The "Masterpieces of NAMU" project demonstrated the potential of 3D tours in disseminating knowledge about Ukrainian classical art, providing an opportunity for a detailed study of the works of Oleksandr Murashko, Oleksandr Bohomazov, Oleksandra Exter and David Burliuk. The virtual reconstruction of the "Kola Silvashi" exhibition demonstrated how digital technologies can preserve the integrity of the curatorial vision

and convey a unique colouristic concept even after the physical exhibition has ended. The VR project "War Up Close" served as an example of the application of immersive technologies for documenting historical events and shaping collective memory. An analysis of Ukrainian projects – from 3D tours and digital reconstructions to VR exhibitions – demonstrated that these formats fulfil several important functions at once: they provide safe access to art, generate interest among an international audience, contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, and create new opportunities for interpreting works. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the digital environment can not only replicate a real-life exhibition but also offer its own unique ways of engaging with artistic material. The findings of this study have highlighted the need for further research into developing unified methodological approaches to archiving virtual exhibitions and integrating such formats into the educational programmes of art institutions and museums. It is also important to analyse interdisciplinary research into the impact of VR and 3D exhibitions on the perception of art by different groups of viewers, which creates a new ecosystem for the promotion of Ukrainian art and the expansion of its presence in the global cultural sphere.

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Віртуальні виставкові формати в популяризації образотворчого мистецтва України

■ **Анотація.** Метою дослідження було проаналізувати еволюцію форм репрезентації українського образотворчого мистецтва в умовах інтеграції цифрових платформ та імерсивних технологій у музейну практику. У роботі було зроблено акцент на виявленні того, як VR, AR, WebXR, мультимедійні інтерфейси та 3D-реконструкції переформатовували комунікативні контури мистецького простору, впливали на когнітивно-емоційний досвід користувача та генерували нові моделі взаємодії аудиторії з художніми артефактами. Методологія дослідження базувалася на синтезі культурологічного, компаративного, структурно-функціонального та історико-логічного підходів, що дозволило реконструювати мультиплексні зв'язки між технологічними інноваціями, естетичними трансформаціями та етичними імперативами в процесі віртуалізації виставкових практик. Такий методологічний фокус дав змогу простежити, як цифрові середовища формують когнітивні й сенсорні моделі сприйняття художнього твору, а також як вони трансформують традиційні схеми інтерпретації та естетичної оцінки. У дослідженні було проаналізовано такі українські проекти: віртуальний тур «Шедеври NAMU» Національного художнього музею України, 3D-реконструкція виставки «Кола Сільваші», VR-проект «Війна впритул», а також експозиція «Український портрет XVII-XX століть» на платформі eMuseum. online. Також, було деталізовано функції AR/VR-платформ у формуванні інтерактивного, адаптивного досвіду користувача, виявлено особливості емоційно-когнітивної взаємодії з віртуальним середовищем, а також систематизовано правові та етичні виклики, що виникають у контексті оцифрування мистецьких об'єктів. Аналітичне осмислення сучасних віртуальних експозицій засвідчило, що цифрові технології стали не лише репрезентативним інструментом, а й каталізатором інклюзивності, демократизації доступу та забезпечення збереження культурної пам'яті. Віртуальні виставки набули статусу автономних, самодостатніх культурних екосистем, що доповнили фізичну музейну інфраструктуру та забезпечили безперервний доступ до контенту незалежно від географічних, часових і соціально-економічних обмежень. Розвиток цих форматів став важливим для генерації нових стратегій музейної комунікації, сприяв міжнародній репрезентації українського мистецтва та створив базис для вдосконалення етичних, технологічних і методологічних стандартів цифрової культурної спадщини

■ **Ключові слова:** віртуальні експозиції; цифрова культурна екосистема; VR/AR платформи; Web Extended Reality; 3D-репрезентація; художнє надбання України



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Theatrical awards as an institutional phenomenon of the global cultural space: The case of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award

Abstract. The aim of this article was to analyse theatre awards as an institutional phenomenon in the global cultural sphere, using the Ukrainian theatre award “Kyiv Pectoral” as a case study. The research methodology was based on a combination of cultural, sociological and institutional approaches, utilising qualitative content analysis of academic sources, comparative analysis of international award practices, and structural-functional analysis of the activities of award-granting institutions. The article examined the phenomenon of theatre awards as a component of the global cultural space. It systematises and analyses global, particularly European and American, theatre experience in awarding state and non-state cultural initiatives. The generalisations drawn have enabled an analysis of the local context in which Ukrainian theatre awards operate, identifying their characteristic features, development challenges, potential for change, and markers of modernisation, taking into account global experience. In particular, the Ukrainian theatre award “Kyiv Pectoral” was analysed as an example of the formation of cultural capital and the recognition of professional achievements in the field of performing arts. Theatre awards were considered not merely as a form of encouragement, but as a mechanism of canonisation that defined standards of professionalism, artistic quality and the social impact of theatre. The study focused on the symbolic and reputational functions of the awards, which contributed to the legitimisation of new theatrical practices, trends and names. The normative and communicative functions of theatre awards were identified; key structural issues in the functioning of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award were revealed, in particular the transparency of expert evaluation, the relevance of nominations and the integration of the independent theatre sector. The history of the emergence of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award, its transformations, and its impact on the theatre community of Kyiv and Ukraine as a whole were examined. The need to modernise the award system in Ukrainian theatre in line with international practices was emphasised. A vision of the theatre award as a dynamic socio-cultural structure was proposed, one that should respond to changes in the professional environment and contribute to the sustainable development of theatre. The study presented arguments regarding the functioning of theatre management within state and non-state creative initiatives as an element of cultural policy at the local (municipal) and national levels. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the findings to modernise the national awards system and improve theatre management tools

Keywords: performing arts; cultural policy; theatre management; theatre awards; independent theatre; symbolic capital; institutional legitimacy

Introduction

In the 21st century, theatre awards have become not only a means of cultural recognition but also a key institutional component in the formation of symbolic capital, which has shaped the social legitimacy of the performing arts. Their role has been increasingly examined within the contexts of cultural management, the sociology of

art, and institutional analysis. In global academia, awards have been viewed as mechanisms for creating a professional canon, strengthening the reputational power of cultural agents, and implementing policies of inclusion and diversity. M. Yakovenko (2022) emphasised that the effective application of management and marketing

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is key to the sustainable development of independent theatres and the expansion of their audience, which had socio-cultural significance for contemporary Ukrainian society. In a study by R. Ikeuchi (2025), based on the 2016 Tony Awards, it was examined how high-profile award ceremonies and cultural visibility can influence public perceptions of racial inequality and public debates surrounding representation in the theatrical sphere. J.F. English (2008) noted that prizes and awards function as an “economy of prestige”: they produce and redistribute symbolic value within culture, influencing canons, artists’ reputations and institutional mechanisms for legitimising artistic practices. S. Trostenko (2025), in her study of the characteristics of the theatre movement during the period 2025–2026, noted that theatre festivals continued to adapt to the conditions of war, whilst preserving their cultural mission and expanding their social role. She also analysed the characteristics of Ukrainian and international theatre awards.

C.O. Nuere *et al.* (2017) summarised 25 years of cultural management development in Europe in their publication and demonstrated the evolution of recognition tools in the cultural sector. The issue of theatrical cultural management has generally remained a relatively “narrow field” within creative industries research in other countries. In this context, works focusing on the development of cultural management systems, institutional modernisation and the role of state support for culture have proved significant. L. Labaronne & L. Leuschen (2021) analysed data from amateur theatre supported by the state, specifically the organisation of a multinational refugee theatre in Switzerland, as an example of participatory projects and organisations that use art and cultural activity as a means of social integration. The study of such experience is highly relevant to contemporary Ukrainian realities, given the significant number of internally displaced persons as well as Ukrainians of various nationalities who have become refugees or received temporary protection status in EU countries. The authors noted that the example of not only the creation but also the sustained development of the “Theatre Malika” demonstrates the formation of official cultural policy as a response to the dramatic challenges of modernity. In Ukraine, attention to institutional forms of cultural recognition has also been growing, but academic research on the topic remains insufficient. O. Mukha & O. Darmoriz (2021) emphasised an interdisciplinary approach to the development of competencies in the field of cultural management. The authors noted the distinction between cultural and creative industries and the functional diversification of cultural management. A. Liashushchenko (2021) emphasised that the contemporary system of state theatre management in Ukraine required an update to its quality-enhancing tools, which could include incentive mechanisms. B.-H. Beniuk (2024) pointed out that the academic discourse on Ukrainian theatre developed more slowly than the journalistic discourse,

and that much of the content reflected the influence of traumatic wartime experiences on creative decisions, particularly regarding the functioning of awards. H. Lypkivska (2020) analysed the All-Ukrainian Theatre Festival and the “GRA” Award, describing its operational mechanism and participant statistics. The author noted that the festival revealed key trends in contemporary theatre life – decentralisation, the personalisation of creative processes, and the absence of broad institutional frameworks. Within this framework, awards served as a tool for strengthening the professional environment. The study by E. Mammadova & A. Abdullayev (2025) highlighted the economic potential of theatre, emphasising the link between cultural capital and award systems as a source of social and economic influence.

Thus, an analysis of academic sources has shown that, within the global humanities, theatre awards have been examined primarily in the context of the economics of prestige, cultural policy and the sociology of art, whereas in Ukrainian academic discourse they have remained a marginal subject of research. Academic publications have largely focused on general issues of theatre management or cultural policy, without offering a systematic analysis of awards as institutional mechanisms of recognition. The aim of the study was to analyse theatre awards as an institutional phenomenon within the global cultural sphere, using the Ukrainian “Kyiv Pectoral” award as a case study. The research objectives were: 1) to analyse contemporary approaches to understanding award mechanisms in the cultural sphere; 2) to examine the functioning of Ukrainian theatre awards in a comparative context; 3) to assess the significance of the “Kyiv Pectoral” as a component of national cultural policy. The novelty of the study lay in a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the award as a socio-cultural institution in the context of post-Soviet transformations. The research methodology was based on a qualitative content analysis of academic publications concerning theatre as a socio-cultural institution in general, and the role of awards and prizes in the cultural sphere. A comparative analysis of international experience with theatre awards made it possible to identify the main features of their implementation in various countries around the world, with an emphasis on the cultural characteristics of each state. Furthermore, management methodologies for the formulation of theatre awards and the subject of the study were analysed, and a structural-functional approach was applied to the study of cultural institutions. A SWOT analysis to evaluate the subject of the study and the theatre award enabled the identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the operation of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award. Thus, in order to achieve the research aim, data on the “Kyiv Pectoral” theatre award was analysed, along with the experience of theatre awards in the USA (Tony Awards), France (Les Molières), Germany (Deutscher Theaterpreis Der

Faust), the UK (“Laurence Olivier Awards”; “Evening Standard Theatre Awards”), Italy (Premio UBU), Spain (Premis Butaca), Greece (the Karolos Koun Award), as well as the award of the All-Ukrainian Theatre Festival-Award “GRA”.

■ Theatre awards as an institutional mechanism for recognition. An analysis of the experience of organising theatre awards around the world

The Tony Awards, USA – a nomination system covering 26 main categories, including “Best Play”, “Best Musical”, “Best Direction”, “Best Actor/Actress” and others. The nomination process was carried out by a special committee comprising approximately 50 theatre professionals appointed by the Tony Awards Administrative Committee, which is required to review all new Broadway productions of the season and determine the nominees by secret ballot. The rules of the awards stipulate that a theatre claiming the title of “Broadway” must have a seating capacity of at least 500, be primarily dedicated to presenting legitimate theatrical productions, and be recognised as “Broadway” by the Tony Awards Administrative Committee. Although the Tony Awards have traditionally been associated with commercial Broadway theatres, independent and non-commercial theatres have also played an important role in the US theatre landscape. Many productions that went on to receive Tony Award nominations and wins were initially staged in independent or non-commercial theatres, such as the New York Theatre Workshop, Second Stage Theatre and others. These theatres often served as incubators for new works that later moved to Broadway stages. Consequently, for an independent theatre production to be considered for a Tony Award nomination, it had to be staged at one of these theatres. This meant that independent theatres without access to such venues could be limited in their ability to secure a nomination. The Tony Awards also recognised the achievements of independent and regional theatres through special awards. In particular, since 1976, the “Regional Theatre Tony Award” has been presented, recognising outstanding achievements by non-commercial theatres across the country. This award recognises the contribution of independent theatres to the development of the theatrical arts in the USA (Tony Awards, n.d.). This experience could be useful for Ukrainian theatre awards, such as the “Kyiv Pectoral”, in developing mechanisms to integrate independent theatres into the system of national recognition.

The Molière Awards (Les Molières) are France’s most prestigious theatre awards, established in 1987 on the initiative of leading figures in the theatre community. They are organised by the non-profit association Les Molières. The award is presented annually with the support of the French Ministry of Culture and in partnership with the national broadcaster France 2, which ensured extensive coverage of the event. State involvement

ensured the award’s legitimacy and contributed to its influence in the country’s cultural life. In 2004, in response to criticism regarding the transparency of the award process, the structure of the Les Molières Association was reformed: a new Board of Directors was established, comprising representatives from both the public and private theatre sectors, as well as independent experts. This step helped to boost confidence in the awards and ensured a more balanced representation of the various players in the theatre industry (Les Molières, n.d.). Professional associations played a key role in the functioning of the Molière Awards. They were involved in forming the jury, determining the evaluation criteria and selecting the nominees. In particular, the Les Molières association worked closely with organisations such as Syndec (National Union of Artistic and Cultural Enterprises), SACD (Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers) and Adami (Association of Performing Artists). This collaboration ensured a professional approach to evaluation and contributed to the development of the theatrical arts in France. The Molière Awards covered a wide range of theatrical genres and forms, including drama, comedy, musicals, youth theatre and others. The selection criteria took into account the number of performances, the size of the theatre and other factors. For example, private sector theatres were required to stage at least 60 performances in a venue with over 90 seats, whilst state theatres were required to stage at least 25 performances in a venue with over 200 seats. These criteria were designed to ensure the quality and professionalism of the participants, but they also sparked debate regarding the accessibility of the award for smaller and independent theatres (Les Molières, n.d.). In response, the Molière Awards introduced special categories and awards, enabling a broader coverage of diverse theatrical initiatives. The Molière Awards have become an example of effective collaboration between the state and professional associations in supporting and developing the theatrical arts. Their structure and selection mechanisms ensured high quality and professionalism, whilst promoting inclusivity and diversity.

The “Der Faust” Award (officially known as the Deutscher Theaterpreis Der Faust) is Germany’s leading national theatre award, which has been presented annually since 2006 for outstanding achievements in the performing arts and as an example of an interdisciplinary approach in contemporary theatre management. It was founded by the German Theatre Association (Deutscher Bühnenverein), the German Academy of Performing Arts (Deutsche Akademie der Darstellenden Künste) and the Cultural Foundation of the German States (Kulturstiftung der Länder). The award aims to recognise innovative and interdisciplinary approaches in theatre arts that reflect contemporary trends in the cultural sector. One of the key features of the “Der Faust” award has been its emphasis on interdisciplinarity. From 2022, a new category was added to the main

ones – “Genrespringer” (genre innovators) – which recognised works that went beyond traditional theatrical forms. This allowed for the recognition of projects that combined various art forms, technology and new media, contributing to the development of theatre as a multidisciplinary space. For example, in 2022, the Herborcht/Mohren duo received an award in the “Genrespringer” category for the project “Das Schaudapot” (Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2022). This project combined the functions of a theatre, an archive, a research centre and a public space, creating a new model of interaction with the audience. “Das Schaudapot” became an example of how theatre can go beyond the stage, integrating social and cultural aspects into its activities. Another example was the nomination of Professor Anselm Dalferth in 2024 for the project “Die Erde über mir” (The Earth above me..., n.d.). This is a musical-theatrical production that combined music, text, movement and space to create a holistic artistic expression. The jury described it as an “exceptional interdisciplinary musical theatre production”. The “Der Faust” Award not only recognised artistic achievements but also influenced management practices in theatre. It facilitated the introduction of new models for organising the theatrical process, which took into account interdisciplinarity, flexibility and innovation. This included the development of new formats for collaboration, the integration of various art forms and the use of modern technologies in theatrical activities. The “Der Faust” Award became an example of how a national theatre award can stimulate the

development of interdisciplinary approaches in the arts. Its focus on innovation, the combination of different genres and forms, and the support of new management models made it an important tool in the development of contemporary theatre.

The Laurence Olivier Awards are the UK’s most prestigious theatre awards, presented annually for outstanding achievements in London’s professional theatre. Established in 1976 as the Society of West End Theatre Awards, it was renamed in 1984 in honour of the distinguished British actor and director Laurence Olivier. The awards were administered by the Society of London Theatre (SOLT), which formed annual juries for various categories: theatre, opera, dance and affiliated theatres. The juries consisted of professional panelists – journalists, casting directors, arts administrators and other specialists – as well as selected members of the public who were great admirers of London theatre. The selection process involved drawing up a long list of nominees, which was then shortlisted through voting by SOLT members and panelists. The winners were determined by a subsequent vote. A Special Award for Outstanding Contribution to Theatre was presented annually. The Laurence Olivier Awards became not only a recognition of artistic achievement but also an important tool for theatre management. In the British context, the Laurence Olivier Awards served as a benchmark of artistic quality and an indicator of leading trends in theatre, and analysis of the awards revealed the dynamics of change within the profession (Fig. 1).

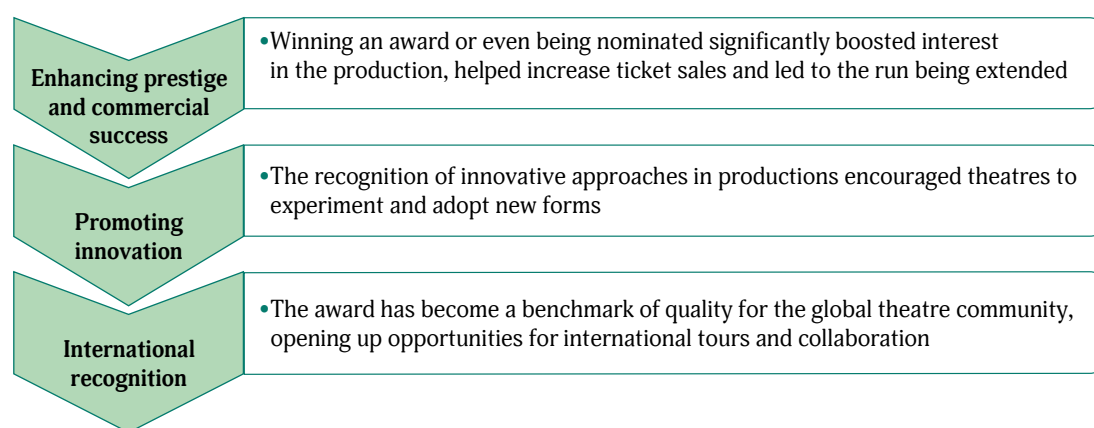


Figure 1. Concept of the Laurence Olivier Award

Source: Official London Theatre.com (n.d.)

The “Evening Standard Theatre Awards” became the oldest theatre award in the United Kingdom, established in 1955, and an example of a regional award similar to the “Kyiv Pectoral”. The award was presented annually for outstanding achievements in London theatre and was organised by the newspaper Evening Standard. It was considered the equivalent of the Drama Desk Awards on Broadway, as it recognised achievements in both major and independent theatres in London. Since its establishment, the Evening Standard Theatre Awards have honoured

the best theatrical productions and performers in London. Between 1955 and 2025, it became an important event in the city’s theatrical calendar, contributing to the recognition of both established and emerging talents. The Evening Standard Theatre Awards had a significant influence on theatre management in London and the United Kingdom as a whole (Kate Bush Encyclopedia, n.d.)

The “Premio Ubu” became Italy’s most prestigious theatre award, recognising achievements in Italian theatre. The award was organised by the Ubu Association

with the support of cultural institutions. A distinctive feature of the award was its emphasis on innovation and support for young talent; it was founded in 1977 by theatre critic Franco Quadri. The name of the award was a reference to Alfred Jarry's play "Ubu Roi", symbolising an avant-garde spirit and experimentalism. Initially, the award also covered cinema and opera, but from 1979 it focused exclusively on the theatrical arts. Following Franco Quadri's death in 2011, the organisation of the award was taken over by the "Ubu per Franco Quadri" association, which continued his work, maintaining a critical approach and a focus on innovation in theatre. The Ubu Award was presented annually based on the results of a vote by a wide range of theatre critics, researchers and specialists. The selection process consisted of two stages: first, a shortlist of nominees was drawn up, followed by a final vote to determine the winners. This approach ensured objectivity and took into account diverse perspectives on the contemporary theatre scene (UBU Awards, n.d.).

The "Premis Butaca" Award in Catalonia recognised achievements in Catalan theatre. The award was organised with the participation of the audience, who voted for the nominees, which helped to engage the public in the theatrical process and foster the development of independent theatres. The Premis Butaca is also an interesting example of a regional award, established in 1995 in Catalonia. Its distinctive feature was that the winners were determined solely by audience voting, making it unique among other theatre awards in Europe. The aim of the award was to recognise outstanding achievements in the theatrical arts, focusing on the audience's opinion as the primary criterion for evaluation. The award was initiated by the presenters of the radio programme "Des de la butaca" on the local radio station Premià de Mar. Since its inception, it has become a significant event in the cultural life of Catalonia. Since 2006, the "Premis

Butaca" award ceremonies have been held in various cities across Catalonia. Winners were determined by an open public vote, a feature that set the award apart from other European theatre prizes (Butaca Awards, n.d.).

The Karolos Koun Award (Greece) was organised by the Association of Greek Theatre and Music Critics with the support of the Municipality of Athens and has been presented annually since 1988. The award was named after the Greek theatre director Karolos Koun (1908-1987), the founder of the Athens-based Theatro Technis. The establishment and administration of the award were initiated by the Association of Greek Theatre and Music Critics in cooperation with OPANDA – the Organisation for Culture, Sports and Youth of the Municipality of Athens. The selection of laureates was carried out by a jury composed of theatre and music critics from Greece. In addition to the main nominations, the award included special distinctions and honorary mentions for contributions to the development of theatre and music (Association of Greek Theatre and Music Critics, award regulations; Days of Art in Greece, 2023).

The All-Ukrainian Theatre Festival-Award "GRA" is a cultural and artistic event established by the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine in 2018 with the aim of recognising the most outstanding creative achievements in the field of theatre. The event has been held annually on a competitive basis, based on the results of the previous calendar year, with the award granted following the outcomes of the festival. The initiative had the ambitious goal of creating a national theatrical equivalent of the Academy Awards; however, organisational difficulties between 2022 and 2025, the high cost of participation and staging, and other parameters of the festival-award limited the applicability of the "GRA" experience to the tasks facing the theatrical community of Kyiv. Table 1 presents a comparison of the main features of theatre awards in Europe and the United States.

Table 1. Comparative table of the main characteristics of leading theatre awards in Europe and the USA

Name of the award	Budget/Financing	Entry requirements	Number of nominations	Prize awarded to the winner	Jury format	Features (evaluation criteria)
Tony Awards (USA)	Sponsorship, sale of broadcasting rights	Productions that have opened on Broadway in theatres with a capacity of 500 seats or more	26	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Artistic quality, innovation, commercial success
Molière Awards (France)	Support from the French Ministry of Culture	French theatrical productions	~20	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Contribution to national dramaturgy, interpretation of classical works, innovation
Der Faust (Germany)	State funding, support from cultural foundations	Theatres recommended by the Bühnenverein association	8 main categories + special categories	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Interdisciplinarity, innovation, artistic excellence

Table 1, Continued

Name of the award	Budget/Financing	Entry requirements	Number of nominations	Prize awarded to the winner	Jury format	Features (evaluation criteria)
Laurence Olivier Awards (United Kingdom)	State funding, support from cultural foundations	Professional theatres in London	~25-30 categories	No monetary award; the winner receives a prestigious statuette and status	Professional jury + specialised panels by genre	Assessment includes the artistic quality of the production, directorial interpretation, acting performance, scenography, and innovation; the award shapes the canon of British theatre and influences the commercial success of productions
Evening Standard Theatre Awards (United Kingdom)	Sponsorship, media support	London theatrical productions	~10	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Contribution to the development of theatre, innovation, acting performance
Premio Ubu (Italy)	Support from cultural associations	Italian theatrical productions	~16	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Innovation, support for emerging talent, experimental forms
Premis Butaca (Spain – Catalonia)	Sponsorship, support from local authorities	Theatrical productions in Catalonia	~19	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Audience voting	Popularity among audiences, quality of production, acting performance
Karolos Koun Awards (Greece)	Support from the Municipality of Athens, cultural associations	Greek theatrical productions	~6	Statuette; no monetary award provided	Professional jury	Contribution to national dramaturgy, support for emerging talent, interpretation of classical works

Source: Tony Awards (2025), Premio Ubu (2025), Premis Butaca (2025), Les Molières (n.d.), Der Faust (n.d.), Official London Theatre.com (n.d.), Kate Bush Encyclopedia (n.d.)

The data in Table 1 have made it possible to identify differences in the structure, principles governing the composition of juries, and mechanisms for legitimising theatre awards across different national contexts. A comparative analysis has shown that the effectiveness of award-giving institutions is directly dependent on the level of institutional autonomy, the transparency of procedures, and the involvement of professional communities. Summarising the analysis of international experience in organising theatre awards, the following key institutional parameters can be identified: the existence of clearly defined evaluation criteria; the institutional independence of the jury; the integration of the independent theatre sector; and the communicative openness and public nature of procedures. These parameters have become the basic benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of national award systems.

Features of the organisation of theatre awards in Ukraine.

The history of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a significant period in the history of Ukraine and in the development of

Ukrainian theatre. One of the key factors that initiated a new chapter in the history of theatre in Ukraine was the policy of perestroika proclaimed by the leadership of the USSR, which affected all public spheres of society, including theatre. The policy of glasnost, introduced alongside perestroika, enabled artists to address pressing social issues that had previously been silenced. Theatre became one of the public platforms where these issues were openly discussed. As a result of glasnost, interest in national history increased year by year – stages began to feature productions based on works by previously banned authors, including Mykola Kulish. For instance, in 1989 in Kharkiv, after a long period of prohibition, his play “Myna Mazailo” was revived, and in 1991 director Serhii Proskurnia created a television version of the production (UkrInform, 2012). There also emerged greater opportunities to engage with and analyse contemporary global trends in theatre, as the Cold War came to an end and the USSR began opening its borders, particularly for artists. The stages of national and regional theatres proved insufficient to fully reflect the dynamic social movements of the late twentieth century. This period represented a genuine “grassroots”

revolution in Ukrainian theatre, which was also supported “from above”, enabling the creation of numerous new theatres, particularly in Kyiv. In 1987, the Podil Theatre was established under the direction of Vitaliy Malakhov, in 1988 – the “Koleso” Theatre under the direction of Iryna Klishchevska and the first resident theatre “Suziria”, which still exist in 2025 and have already been recognised as academic (Kiev Academic Theatre “Koleso”, n.d.; Turistic Hub. Kyiv digital, n.d.). At these new theatre venues, directors and actors had greater opportunities to experiment with various genres and forms of theatrical art. Thus, when Ukraine declared independence in 1991, Ukrainian theatre found itself in a renewed state compared to the Soviet period. Overall, the institutional context for the functioning of theatre initiatives and professional communities in Ukraine was shaped by state cultural policy and the activities of professional associations. The general parameters of the state of the performing arts in Ukraine are summarised in a limited number of analytical overviews. Among these is an international English-language publication by the European (Polish) initiative “East European Performing Arts Platform” (Peresunko, 2010).

The rapid development of theatre arts in Kyiv in the late 1980s and early 1990s required careful analysis and synthesis; thus, the creation of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award was a logical outcome in the search for various methods to carry out such an analysis. Examples of theatre awards that existed in various countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s inspired the creation of a new motivational component for Ukrainian artists, in addition to positions and titles. The list of founders of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award and organisers of its first edition, along with a description of their status in the cultural sphere at the time of its establishment, was as follows: Mykola Rushkovsky – Soviet and Ukrainian theatre and film actor, theatre teacher. Through his efforts, the Theatre-Studio “Suziria” was established, and in 2000 the New Drama Theatre in Pechersk was founded. Mykola Hubienkov was an actor; Mykhailo Chemberzhi served as First Deputy Head of the Main Department of Culture of Kyiv from 1989 to 1994, during which he created and led the Kyiv City Arts Committee; and Timur Ibraimov, a theatre and film actor, participated in the establishment of the “Koleso” Theatre. As of 2025, he remained the only individual still involved in the award since its founding. It was through the efforts of these figures that, in 1992, in collaboration with the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine and the Main Department of Culture of the City of Kyiv, the ‘Kyiv Pectoral’ Award was established. The first award ceremony took place on 27 March 1993 – on International Theatre Day. Thus, the tradition of awarding and presenting the prize specifically on Theatre Day was established. It was significant that in 1993, one of the best dramatic productions was recognised as “The Lady Without Camellias”, directed by Roman Vityuk, whose work had been viewed with ambivalence in

Ukraine during the Soviet era. Timur Ibraimov outlined the circumstances surrounding the creation of the “Kyiv Pectoral”, particularly the roles of Mykola Hubienkov, Mykhailo Chemberzhi, and Mykola Rushkovskyi in its organisational and institutional formation in the early 1990s. He also emphasised the necessity of reforming and revitalising the award in light of its enduring symbolic significance for the theatrical life of Kyiv (Creative Ukraine, 2026).

Between 1995 and 2025, the organisation of the award was carried out by the Kyiv branch of the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine in cooperation with the Department of Culture of the Kyiv City State Administration. The award was presented annually, with funding for the ceremony and prizes allocated from the budget of the city of Kyiv. The chief organiser of the award was the prominent theatre manager, People’s Artist of Ukraine, and head of the Kyiv City organisation of the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine, Professor Oleksii Pavlovych Kuzhelnyi. An active role in the work of the award was also played by O. Bezghin, I. Hensytska, L. Oltarzhevska, and Ya. Partola. The award was presented in the following categories: Best Production, Best Chamber Stage Production, Best Children’s Production, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Scenography, Best Musical Concept of a Production, and Best Choreography. Between 1995 and 2025, 31 ceremonies were held (the 2020 ceremony took place online due to quarantine restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic). Most frequently (23 out of 31), the award ceremonies were held at the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre (National Union of Theatre Artists of Ukraine, n.d.)

As of 2025, the procedure for awarding and presenting the “Kyiv Pectoral” prize is governed by Decision No. 6905/6946 (2023) of the Kyiv City Administration. The prize was awarded in 14 categories to mark World Theatre Day on 27 March. The five-member organising committee was approved each year by a special Order of the Director of the Department of Culture of the Kyiv City State Administration. The organising committee was headed by co-chairs representing the award’s organisers: the Department of Culture and the Kyiv Local Creative Branch of the National Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine. The organising committee appointed two groups: a panel of experts and an administrative and organisational group. After reviewing the performances that took place in Kyiv from 1 January to 31 December of the year preceding the award ceremony on 27 March, the panel of experts submitted its recommendations to the organising committee regarding the awarding of prizes in 14 categories. The Regulations do not specify the procedure for forming the expert group or the methods used by the experts to evaluate the performances. Funding for the award by the city was earmarked for “organising events to present awards and honour the laureates”. Nor

do the Regulations state that only national and municipal theatres may participate in the competition, although in reality this was the case. Since 2022, the award has not been presented, and no award ceremonies have been held (Kyiv City State Administration, n.d.). As of 31 December 2025, there are no official digital resources for the award available in the public domain; there is no record of a dedicated website or public digital archive for the award.

The “Kyiv Pectoral” Award has occupied a special place in Ukraine’s theatrical landscape as a symbolic recognition of achievements in the performing arts. Established in 1992, it became not only a professional award but also a marker of the capital’s cultural identity. The award’s name draws on the Scythian pectoral of the 4th century BC – an artefact of spiritual grandeur that symbolised a connection to the origins of Ukrainian culture. This approach reinforced the award’s image as the heir to a high artistic tradition. At the same time, its concept echoed the ancient dramatic competitions of

Ancient Greece, where theatrical achievements were assessed as part of the public life of the polis and victory in them held both artistic and civic significance (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, n.d.). In the field of cultural management, the “Kyiv Pectoral” served to legitimise artistic practices and quality standards. The presence of over 10 categories stimulated competition and artistic exploration in the theatre. The award ceremony took on a ritualistic character, transforming the event into a symbol of the theatre season and attracting the attention of the general public. Despite political and social transformations, the award retained its significance, remaining an enduring cultural brand. It also served as a cultural archive, documenting the theatrical history of Kyiv and Ukraine. Thus, the “Kyiv Pectoral” had not only professional but also profound cultural and symbolic significance – as an instrument for shaping the national theatrical canon and strengthening the cultural identity of society. Table 2 outlines the main issues regarding the functioning of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award.

Table 2. Analysis of the functioning issues of the “Kyiv Pectoral” award using the SWOT analysis method

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. The cultural and symbolic significance of the award. 2. The presence of a motivational component for participants: both non-material and material aspects. 3. The discovery of new names. 4. Contribution to the popularisation of theatrical art in the capital of Ukraine	1. Lack of inclusion of Kyiv’s non-state theatres. 2. Insufficient transparency in matters concerning the formation of the jury and the financing of its activities. 3. Insufficient transparency in the system of evaluation and the awarding of nominations
Opportunities	Threats
1. Engagement of new stakeholders and integration of the non-state theatre sector. 2. Reform of participant selection criteria. 3. Reform of participant evaluation criteria. 4. Establishment of a clear procedure for the formation of an expert council and the financing of its activities. 5. Use of digital tools for evaluation and the awarding of nominations; digitalisation of the evaluation and nomination process	1. Martial law and the risks associated with it: • possible difficulties with funding; • physical danger due to shelling and large-scale attacks; • disruptions to energy supply due to shelling and large-scale attacks; • interruptions to heating. 2. Lack of a quorum in the Kyiv City Council to adopt a new regulatory document that would allow the existing issues in the functioning of the competition to be addressed. 3. Lack of awareness among part of the theatrical community of the need to address the existing problems in the functioning of the award

Source: compiled by the author

In order to continue operating effectively, the “Kyiv Pectoral” Award requires substantial reform, including the adoption of a new version of the Award Regulations. International practice has demonstrated effective models of theatre awards based on a combination of transparent evaluation criteria, institutional support, audience engagement and innovative management. In particular, awards such as the Tony Awards, Der Faust, Premio Ubu and Butaca have successfully adapted their formats to changes in the socio-cultural context, supported independent theatres, developed the audience base and invested in young theatrical talent. These practices may be relevant to the reform of the “Kyiv Pectoral”. Given the state of war, limited budget and the need for transparency, the proposed concept for renewal was timely and contained progressive solutions: optimisation

of nominations, with an emphasis on innovation, independent theatres and social impact, which corresponded both to the experience of the Premio Ubu and Faust, and to the contemporary needs of Ukrainian society. The hybrid jury format combined professional evaluation (as in the Tony or Faust awards) with audience voting (as in Butaca) via online tools – an effective way of democratising the process whilst maintaining expertise. Budgetary and logistical adaptability – the intimate scale of the ceremony, partnerships with arts venues, digital broadcasting and transparent funding – aligned with the contemporary practices of the Faust and Evening Standard Awards, which reduced costs whilst maintaining prestige. Domestic tourism and digitalisation served as a strategic direction for promoting theatre in the context of post-war recovery and the easing of physical

restrictions on movement. Thus, the “Kyiv Pectoral” had the potential to transform into a modern, open and influential institution of cultural recognition, combining local values with the best international practices of theatre management. To this end, the following steps were proposed to create a renewed concept for the award, which can be systematised as “Key Proposals for Reforming the Award”. Diversifying the nominations to nine categories will broaden the scope for encouraging creativity. The main categories could be: (title) “Performance of the Year” – (award) Pectoral statuette, certificate, cash prize; “Audience Choice Award” – Pectoral statuette; “For Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Theatre in Kyiv” (honorary Pectoral statuette); and “Audience Choice Award” (Pectoral statuette, certificate). Optional additional nominations may include: “Best Independent Theatre of the Year”, “Theatrical Innovation of the Year”, “Emerging Stage Award”, “Social Theatre”, and “Best Contemporary Play”. Changes to the jury composition and the evaluation system will enhance trust in the process and encourage the involvement of the expert community. The award jury will consist of seven independent experts who do not participate in the competition programme. It is recommended that the jury include specialists from Kyiv, other cities in Ukraine and, where possible, international representatives. Evaluation should be conducted via a Google Form, with results automatically processed in a Google Sheet, which experts complete immediately after viewing the performance, on the condition that they cannot be altered subsequently. For the “Audience Choice Award” category, there should be an open online vote, the results of which are also tallied digitally. This aligns with the concept of the award, ensures audience participation and provides a realistic reflection of public opinion. The format and logistics of the ceremony must be adapted to promote greater openness and the integration of digital technologies. The main components should be an intimate awards ceremony with an online broadcast, collaboration with independent theatres, cultural venues and online platforms, and mixed funding: grants, patrons, crowdfunding and partnerships. The creation of a digital archive of the awards with open access and an interactive web platform for communication with the theatre community will ensure the preservation of the experience gained and “constant engagement” with target audiences and stakeholders on a 24/7 basis. The expected outcomes of the modernisation will ensure the establishment of a transparent, modern system of theatrical recognition, support for independent (non-state) theatre, the engagement of new audiences, particularly young people, the strengthening of Kyiv’s reputation as a theatre capital, and the creation of a transparent evaluation system.

R. Kostin (2024) analysed theatre as a complex socio-cultural instrument that reflects and transforms social processes, contributes to the formation of national identity and intercultural dialogue, and serves as a

platform for discussing pressing social issues and offering criticism. I. Bezhin (2005) analysed the intersection of art and the market, highlighting the commercialisation of artistic expression. The author critically assessed the influence of market forces on artistic value and the autonomy of artists, offering reflections on the economic dynamics shaping the art world. B. Fogel & B.A. Crawford (2025) focused on the entrepreneurial aspects of arts management in non-profit theatre. The researchers identified key leadership traits that have become essential for success in this sector, notably adaptability, innovation and strategic vision, and provided practical recommendations for cultural leaders working in the non-profit theatre sector. D. van der Plicht (2015) analysed how theatre awards influenced the run lengths of musicals in London’s West End between 2005 and 2013. The researchers demonstrated that winning Olivier Awards and WhatsOnStage Awards is associated with longer runs, whilst nominations without a win at the WhatsOnStage Awards may be linked to a reduction in run length following the awards ceremony. O. Karulin (2017) analysed the popularity of theatre productions in Estonia between 2010 and 2015, defining popularity through external economic capital (number of admissions) and internal symbolic value (theatre award nominations). M. Hodge (2020) examined musicals that were nominated for or won the Tony Award for Best Musical and demonstrated that nominations and wins in this category had a significant positive impact on the run length of their original Broadway productions. The author also described the key features of how awards function in this sector. R.T. Warne (2018) analysed how Tony Award nominations and wins influenced the financial success and run length of Broadway productions, demonstrating that receiving a nomination or winning significantly increased weekly box office takings and reduced the likelihood of a production closing. A. Bohdanovych & O. Annichev (2025) analysed contemporary approaches to managing theatre organisations in an unstable environment. Thus, theatre awards have a positive impact on the financial success and run length of productions, as well as on the popularity of theatre productions, as measured by attendance and internal recognition. At the same time, these awards help to preserve the cultural autonomy of the theatre, support independent theatres and contribute to the development of the theatre industry through entrepreneurial and innovative strategies.

Conclusions

Following a study of theatre awards as an institutional phenomenon within the cultural sphere, and using the “Kyiv Pectoral” award as a case study, a number of generalisations were formulated. The “Kyiv Pectoral” Award functioned as a stable instrument of professional legitimisation within the capital’s theatre community and was governed by an updated regulatory document from 2023. At the same time, the analysis revealed structural

problems: a vaguely defined mechanism for forming the expert panel, a lack of detailed evaluation criteria, and limited integration of the independent sector. A comparative analysis of international experience helped to identify institutional differences. The American model (Tony Awards) demonstrated clear procedural regulations, a broad nomination system and a separate category for regional theatres. The French Les Molières award combined state support and professional associations, ensuring a balance between sectors. The German Deutscher Theaterpreis Der Faust emphasised interdisciplinarity and innovation, as reflected in its special categories. The British Laurence Olivier Awards and Evening Standard Theatre Awards implemented a model combining a professional jury with public influence. The Italian Premio Ubu functioned as an expert-critical platform, whilst the Catalan Premis Butaca was based exclusively on audience voting. The Greek Karolos Koun Awards had municipal support and a professional jury with a focus on national drama. Thus, the effectiveness of award institutions depended directly on the transparency of procedures, institutional autonomy, and the involvement

of professional communities and the independent sector. The modernisation of the “Kyiv Pectoral” should include updating the nomination structure, standardising evaluation criteria, and expanding the representation of non-state theatres, which will help strengthen the capital’s cultural capital and enhance the competitiveness of the Ukrainian theatre scene. The inclusion of audience voting via online tools will ensure democratic processes and greater audience participation in shaping theatrical trends, as well as helping to popularise theatre among younger audiences. Prospects for further research lie in a comparative analysis of other examples of Ukrainian theatre awards and their impact on cultural identity.

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Театральні премії як інституційний феномен світового культурного простору: на прикладі премії «Київська пектораль»

■ **Анотація.** Метою статті став аналіз театральних премій як інституційного феномену світового культурного простору на прикладі української театральної премії «Київська пектораль». Методологія дослідження ґрунтувалася на поєднанні культурологічного, соціологічного та інституційного підходів, із застосуванням якісного контент-аналізу наукових джерел, компаративного аналізу міжнародних преміальних практик та структурно-функціонального аналізу діяльності преміальних інституцій. У статті розглянуто феномен театральних премій як складової світового культурного простору. Систематизовано та проаналізовано світовий, зокрема європейський та американський театральний досвід преміювання державних та недержавних культурних ініціатив. Проведені узагальнення дозволили проаналізувати локальний контекст функціонування українських театральних премій, визначити їх характерні риси, виклики розвитку, потенціал до змін та маркери модернізації, зважаючи на світовий досвід. Зокрема, проаналізовано українську театральну премію «Київська пектораль» як приклад формування культурного капіталу та визнання професійних досягнень у сфері сценічного мистецтва. Театральні премії розглядалися не лише як форма заохочення, а як механізм канонізації, що визначав стандарти професіоналізму, художньої якості та соціального впливу театру. В межах дослідження було акцентовано увагу на символічній і репутаційній функціях премій, які сприяли легітимації нових театральних практик, тенденцій та імен. Було визначено нормативну та комунікативну функції театральних премій; виявлено ключові структурні проблеми функціонування премії «Київська пектораль», зокрема питання прозорості експертного оцінювання, актуальності номінацій та інтеграції незалежного театрального сектору. Було досліджено історію виникнення премії «Київська пектораль», її трансформації, а також вплив на театральну спільноту Києва та України загалом. Було наголошено на потребі модернізації преміальної системи в українському театрі відповідно до міжнародних практик. Запропоновано бачення театральної премії як динамічної соціокультурної структури, що має реагувати на зміни у професійному середовищі та сприяти сталому розвитку театру. У дослідженні було запропоновано аргументи функціонування театрального менеджменту державних та недержавних творчих ініціатив, як елементу культурної політики на локальному (міському) та національному рівнях. Практичне значення дослідження полягає у можливості використання отриманих висновків для модернізації національної преміальної системи та вдосконалення інструментів театрального менеджменту.

■ **Ключові слова:** сценічне мистецтво; культурна політика; театральний менеджмент; театральна нагорода; незалежний театр; символічний капітал; інституційна легітимація



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Creative concepts of Ukrainian student projects in the context of internet culture of spectacular theatrical events

Abstract. The aim of the article was to investigate the creative concepts of Ukrainian student projects of spectacular theatrical events within the framework of internet culture. The research methodology involved the use of descriptive, semiotic and practical approaches. The analysis of contemporary trends in the interaction between classical theatre and digital media and online platforms made it possible to reinterpret the stage conceptual environment and to identify useful directorial means of artistic expression. New ways of practically implementing contemporary student projects contributed to the emergence of a number of new directing tools, methods of organising artistic material, rehearsal processes and mechanisms for realising projects. This made it possible to elevate stage art to a new level of cultural development. The study examined the creative experiments of young student groups, their mastery of a variety of stage performance techniques, the integration of new technologies and the exploration of creative preservation of national identity. The results showed that the combination of classical theatrical principles with digital media contributed to enhancing the dynamism of stage action, the ideological direction and vision of the director, the activation of audience perception and the expansion of the boundaries of theatrical space in the contemporary cultural world. The creative experiments of young student groups demonstrated a confident level of mastery of diverse stage performance techniques, the integration of multimedia tools and digital formats, and a commitment to preserving and reinterpreting national cultural identity in the context of globalisation. Examples of contemporary creative projects of spectacular theatrical events and theatrical art by leading Ukrainian directors are provided, and experimental concepts are compared with digital theatre practices in Europe. The performance "Love and Social Media?" was analysed, which emphasised the transformation of human feelings in the digital environment and the loss of direct emotional communication, as well as the video monoperformance-confession "Refugee", in which the protagonist's personal story reflects a journey from pre-war reality to an awareness of the tragedy of war and the idea of the resilience of the Ukrainian people. The phantasmagorical tale "The Treasure of Jolly Roger" was also analysed, notable for its dynamic action, active interaction with the audience and the use of experimental lighting effects as part of the director's language. This made it possible to outline prospects for the further development of stage art, specific forms of theatrical art, and to define digitalisation as an important factor in the contemporary cultural process

Keywords: directorial interpretation; digital theatre; creative practices; performance technique; Ukrainian directors

Introduction

Under the influence of digital trends in the performing arts and spectacular theatrical events, key principles of artistic thinking and new directorial concepts for creative projects have evolved, transforming the performance process. Student theatre in Ukraine has become

not only a platform for training young actors, directors and theatre scholars, but also a space for cultural exploration. R. Kucher (2020) described interactive theatre as a natural stage in the evolution of theatrical form in the context of globalisation and interdisciplinarity,

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concluding that there has been a fundamental shift in the role of the audience – from passive observer to co-creator of the stage action. In the contemporary context, the dimension of internet culture has increasingly shaped new challenges and theatrical possibilities: digital communication, online streams of performances, and the visual aesthetics of social media for creative projects have transformed the perception of theatre as an exclusively “offline” art form. Within the context of contemporary theatrical and performative practices, researcher K. Stanislavska (2021) characterised the performative forms of contemporary art as a marker of postmodernist style, emphasising the dominance of spectacle, corporeality and visualisation. O. Muzyka *et al.* (2021) argued that arts education should be based on principles of transformation, where the learner becomes an active co-creator of the artistic process. Research into the ephemerality of information disseminated in the digital space was brought to the fore, where theatrical content appearing on social media or online platforms had a short “lifecycle”, quickly losing relevance and getting lost in the flow of other messages. This posed a challenge for the creation of a student creative project, raising questions not only about methods of presentation but also about the preservation of cultural value in a world where the audience’s attention was becoming increasingly fragmented. Researcher T. Khvostova (2023) examined the influence of internet culture on contemporary Ukrainian theatre. The author analysed how digital platforms and online practices have transformed the interaction between the audience and the theatrical work, expanded the possibilities of performative formats, and created new directorial strategies. In this context, the directorial technique known as the “kaleidoscope” – the rapid succession of scenes, episodes or images on stage – took on particular significance. The dynamism and fragmented rhythm of this artistic approach mirrored the experience of the modern individual, who finds themselves in an environment of constantly shifting information flows. The “kaleidoscope” in theatre became not only an artistic technique but also a metaphor for the internet dimension, where fleeting images replaced one another, forming a new reality that is difficult to grasp in its entirety. Research highlighted the role of AR/VR and multimedia systems in expanding the possibilities of scenography, audience participation and the educational process, which met the demands of a post-media society. The author Y.-J. Kim *et al.* (2024) investigated the influence of a virtual audience on the perception of theatrical performance, which demonstrated a significant enhancement of the social experience for individual users in AR space. K. Iudova-Romanova *et al.* (2023) examined the use of virtual reality (VR) in contemporary theatre productions, where it has become a tool for expanding the stage space, providing new ways of presenting drama and integrating the audience. The authors provided empirical data on

the impact of VR on the emotional perception of performances and its potential for inclusion in the teaching of theatre studies. Focusing on the media-driven nature of contemporary cultural perception, it is worth referring to the study by O. Pavlova (2015), in which the author analysed the phenomenon of modernism as a state of constant change and visual saturation. It is also worth noting the analysis of innovative technologies in the arts. D. Zadorozhnia (2024) highlighted the impact of digital solutions on scenography and artistic practice in puppet theatre, emphasising examples of the integration of multimedia effects and software tools in the creation of a dynamic theatrical image. Internet culture has developed amidst digitalisation, visual speed and interactivity, prompting future directors, producers and performers to adapt their artistic means of expression and to embody new forms of visual imagery in spectacular theatrical events. The aim of this article was to explore issues relating to directorial staging concepts, artistic and interpretative performance techniques, their contemporary transformation under the influence of digital culture, and the challenges of realising these in the cultural space for a contemporary audience.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a range of theoretical and practical methods, including: the analytical method – for reviewing academic works on the digitisation of the performing arts and interactive theatre; comparative analysis – to contrast classical directing principles with contemporary digital formats of stage performance; art-historical analysis – to identify the characteristics of visual thinking and artistic design in student projects; observation and generalisation of practical experience – during the implementation of educational theatrical performances, online screenings and hybrid stage forms; as well as the method of creative experimentation, which allowed for the testing of new directing tools within a digital environment. The study analysed original performances and stage works that combined classical principles of directing with new forms of media interaction. These included the performance “Love and Social Media?” as an independent project within the 2020 “Business & Hobby” International Handicrafts Exhibition (Practical work in the field of..., 2026), which explored the issue of communication and emotional dependence in the digital environment. An important stage was also the creation and practical presentation of a documentary work and a one-act production in the Zoom format – the dramatic monoperformance “The Heart of a Refugee” (2023), which demonstrated the potential of online theatre in addressing socially sensitive themes, as well as the phantasmagorical tale “The Treasure of Jolly Roger” (2025), which combined elements of interactive theatre, visual effects and digital scenography. Contemporary student projects not only illustrated the theoretical tenets of the research but also confirmed the

effectiveness of integrating classical directorial principles with new media forms, forming a coherent artistic concept in the context of the digitalisation of the performing arts. A comparative analysis of real-life case studies of student theatre projects in various countries demonstrated this trend. The Polish “Teatr Online” format, as part of the educational project “Teatr na faktach” (Jerzy Grotowski Institute, 2024), emphasised the preservation of dramaturgical integrity, whilst adapting spatial solutions for multi-camera filming and interactive editing. The Czech project Divadelní Šílenci (n.d.) structured the theatrical action as a series of short episodes reminiscent of a television or streaming format, whilst maintaining the unity of the production’s theme and concept. The Latvian example of the production “Sapraši un nesapraši” in a Zoom performance format at Liepājas teātris (2021) demonstrated that even in a virtual space, where actors are in the same room or in their own rooms, the director achieves a cohesive spatial solution through the synchronisation of actions and the use of Zoom’s capabilities as a “stage”. These practices have demonstrated that media theatre does not abolish the traditional principles of directing, but transforms them, expanding the boundaries of theatrical creativity in the age of internet culture. Additionally, the creative solutions of leading Ukrainian directors were analysed as a benchmark for student projects within the context of internet culture. In particular, the works of Stas Zhyrkov (“Stalkers”) and Tamara Trunova (“Confronting the shadow”) revealed the active use of video, lighting and minimalist scenography to enhance psychological and visual expressiveness (75th Berliner Festspiele, 2025; Zoloti Vorota. Theatre not a museum, n.d.). The directing concepts of Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi in the production “Eneida” and Vlad Troitskyi in the performance “Smuta” demonstrated a synthesis of national classics, performativity, music and multimedia practices (CCA “DAKH”, 2019; MoeMisto.ua, n.d.). The experience of these artists has contributed to the formation of contemporary directorial thinking among students and the development of new formats of communication with the audience.

Results and Discussion

In the 21st century, even with the transition to online or hybrid formats, the directorial concept has not lost its key components: authorial analysis, the director’s vision, interpretation of the work, comparison of character traits, and the search for an effective scenographic and directorial solution. In order to develop creative concepts, students were required to artistically reinterpret a range of directing tasks and staging issues in the performing arts, namely: the problematics of the work, its ideological content, thematic direction, spatial design, and to transform the creative project in accordance with the context of digital culture, while unequivocally preserving the defining elements of the creative process and enriching the project with a personal interpretation of the material. The phenomenon of the digitalisation of stage art, in contrast to the classical principles of theatre or concert activity, within the context of synaesthetic visual saturation for the audience, does not diminish a unified artistic directorial concept but rather reveals and emphasises the artistic and figurative integrity of the creative project. At the same time, there is an observable issue concerning the loss of the multifaceted nature of stage speech, oratory skills and the aesthetic classical perception of performance. I. Burnashov (2020) noted that contemporary transformations of stage art are rapidly developing within the lived reality of young audiences in rhythm with modern digital culture. As of 2025, student creative projects were characterised by a predominance of conceptual creativity and innovative technologies; however, contemporary theatre continuously faced the need to overcome stylistic eclecticism, which could mislead audiences regarding the authenticity of performers’ emotions and realistic representation (Lachko, 2020). Thus, attention was drawn to the following challenges: creative, social, worldview and personal perspectives of the director, which had to align with new forms of implementation in the digital environment. It is worth highlighting the most striking examples of theatrical creative projects realised in Europe, particularly in countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Latvia (Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of contemporary international artistic projects

Theatrical project	Country	Format of implementation	Directorial focuses	Distinctive feature
Teatr Online as part of “Teatr na faktach”	Poland	Live streams and recorded performances	Preservation of dramaturgical integrity, adaptation of space for multi-camera filming	Combination of classical theatre with the possibilities of cinematic language
Divadelní Šílenci	Czech Republic	Series of short episodes (streaming format)	Thematic and conceptual unity, presentation of material in “serialised” segments	Creates the effect of a theatrical series
Zoom performance “Sapraši un nesapraši” Liepājas teātris	Latvia	Performances via Zoom	Unity of spatial design through synchronisation of actions, individual interpretation by each actor	Use of Zoom as a stage platform

Source: Liepājas teātris (2021), Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego (2024), Divadelní Šílenci (n.d.)

In the context of digital transformation, the student creative project has not lost its key directorial components – theme, concept, spatial design and personal interpretation – instead, they have taken on new forms of expression: online platforms have become the stage, editing and streaming formats have become directorial tools, and the ephemeral nature of internet culture has been reflected in theatrical techniques (Semenyshyn, 2025). This has opened up new horizons for student projects, making them more flexible and contemporary; Ukrainian student projects have demonstrated an openness to experimentation. For example, contemporary directors such as Stas Zhyrkov, Tamara Trunova, Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi and Vlad Troitskyi have demonstrated ways of combining classical stage forms with the latest media practices, their experience serving as a reference point for student groups seeking new means of expression. Director Stas Zhyrkov, in the production “Stalkers” at the Zoloti Vorota Theatre, combined psychological theatre and a classical dramaturgical foundation with video projections, rhythmic scene editing and the atmosphere of a post-industrial digital world, creating an effect of cinematic presence (Zoloti Vorota. Theatre not a museum, n.d.). The production of the burlesque fantasy “Eneida” by director Rostyslav Derzhypilskyi demonstrated a synthesis of national classics with contemporary media tools – the use of multimedia imagery, musical samples and stage irony – which brought the classical text to life for the modern audience (MoeMisto.ua, n.d.). In the production “Smuta” by director Vlad Troitskyi, the classical stage form was transformed through elements of performativity, live music, and light and sound experiments, which created a polyphonic, almost immersive theatrical space (CCA “DAKH”, 2019). In contrast, Tamara Trunova, in the production “Confronting the shadow”, actively employed minimalist scenography, light projections and the use of shadows as a visual media image, combining the intimacy of classical theatre with contemporary visual technologies (75th Berliner Festspiele, 2025). Taken together, these examples demonstrate that the integration of the latest media practices into classical stage forms does not undermine theatrical tradition; on the contrary, it expands its artistic possibilities, creating a productive space for emulation and creative exploration in student theatre projects.

It is worth highlighting several concepts rich in mechanisms of visual realisation, the regeneration of contemporary performing arts techniques, and manifestations of experimental systems of artistic expression, comprehensible not only to the professional community but also to the audience: immersiveness – engaging the audience in the action, where the spectator becomes a participant in the events (for example, in the format of interactive online performances or “live” performances in a physical space); multimedia – combining the stage with video art, projections, VR and AR effects that amplify the emotional impact; fragmentation and montage –

rapid scene changes, akin to the logic of social media content, which matches the rhythm of the modern viewer’s life; personal interpretation – where the director or actor reinterprets the theme through their own experience, creating a dialogue with the audience on the level of emotions and values. Thus, the contemporary creative concepts of Ukrainian student projects are gradually moving beyond the confines of the classical stage and naturally integrating into internet culture, revealing new culture-forming meanings and ideas. The theatre is ceasing to be merely a “meeting place” and is increasingly becoming a communicative platform where the audience and the creator interact in a shared digital space (Burnashov, 2020). All this makes student creative projects more accessible, vibrant and understandable to a young audience accustomed to interactive and rapid consumption of information, whereas for members of the older generation, attending a traditional repertory theatre was often an expression of nostalgia, a way of preserving familiar comforts and established cultural traditions.

The practical aspect of integrating the student project into the digital space was evident in the organisation of hybrid festivals, which combined an offline stage with online broadcasts, and the use of social media – Instagram, TikTok and YouTube – both as promotional channels and as integral parts of the artistic process itself. A key aspect was the introduction of digital dramaturgy, where plays were structured around the cultural codes of social media, as well as the creation of educational case studies through which students learnt the art of directing online performances and the fundamentals of digital scenography. These aspects demonstrated that internet culture did not supplant traditional theatre, but rather provided it with new forms of expression; for students, this was not only a creative challenge but also a practical training ground for mastering interdisciplinary skills: from digital communications to media management. Digital literacy also became crucial, encompassing proficiency in visualisation tools, video editing, sound design and social media as means of artistic communication, which proved useful in addressing the tasks facing the director during the production process of creative projects. Media management played a particular role, fostering the ability to plan, organise and promote artistic events in the digital environment, manage content and engage with audiences. Analytical and reflective thinking also became crucial, enabling a critical assessment of the outcomes of creative work and the impact of technology on audience perception. Based on the goals set for the students, the future directors, all this required flexible thinking and a readiness to adapt to new technological and cultural realities, shaping the profile of the modern artist – the creator-manager, capable of thinking simultaneously as an artist, a communicator and a cultural development strategist.

A vivid example of this integration of contemporary creative concepts was the hybrid festival “Molodist. The-

atre Online” (Mori, 2021), where some performances took place live, whilst others were streamed live with the option to comment via chat. Such practices demonstrated how the combination of theatre and digital tools not only diversified student art projects but also shaped a new culture of reception, where the audience became an active participant in the event. An examination of the creative student project in the digital sphere revealed its dynamism and openness to experimentation; at the same time, it is important to trace how such processes unfolded in a global context, as digitalisation is not merely a Ukrainian trend but a global practice that has enabled theatre to remain relevant in a world of fleeting information. International experience demonstrated the active development of digital theatre through creative projects in the UK, where the National Theatre regularly streamed its productions online as part of the National Theatre at Home project (n.d.), while in the US and Canada, the practice of VR theatres was gaining ground, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in a performance using special devices. In Europe, through the lens of creative exploration, future directors and theatre academy students also introduced innovative approaches: from Zoom performances to their own “theatrical Netflix platforms”, which gave rise to distinctive visual and conceptual directorial concepts, the interconnection of various art forms within the stage space, and multifaceted performance techniques. An important stage in the development of student creative projects was the active implementation of innovative digital solutions aimed at the practical realisation of multifaceted performance techniques.

In educational productions, projection solutions were actively used as an element of scenography, allowing for the creation of a changing visual space, the enhancement of the dramaturgy with video sequences and symbolic imagery, as well as live online broadcasts directly from the stage, which expanded the boundaries of the audience’s presence and fostered a sense of audience participation. Solo performances in video format took on particular significance, where acting skills and the director’s vision were realised through cinematic language, editing and camera work, opening up new possibilities for interpreting stage material and adapting theatrical form to the conditions of digital culture. Such approaches enabled students not only to master the fundamentals of stagecraft but also to experiment with form, space and the interactivity of the action. The use of digital technologies, multimedia effects and modern methods of visual modelling contributed to the formation of a new type of theatrical thinking, in which creative exploration was combined with an analytical understanding of the artistic image. Consequently, Ukrainian student projects were able to integrate such formats whilst retaining their own authenticity and, at the same time, broadening the tastes of the audience (Burnashov, 2020). In such productions, the spectator ceased to be a passive observer

and became an active participant in the event, engaging in emotional empathy with the performers, where interaction unlocked the spectator’s potential, transforming the theatrical space into a space of live dialogue between the actor and the audience. One example of a student project in the field of digital theatre, operating at the intersection of theatre and internet culture, was the project “Love and Social Media?” (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Performance: “Love and Social Media?”
Source: photo by the author

This performance explored the issue of the transformation of personal feelings in the digital space, where emotions, relationships and sincerity were often replaced by visual imagery and virtual communication. The primary artistic means was physical expression and choreography, through which the emotions and inner states of the characters were conveyed. The prologue was constructed as a mass scene, illustrating the power of Wi-Fi over people and introducing the main character; subsequently, through everyday episodes, the characters gradually revealed their feelings through body language and dared to speak their first words in real life. At the same time, in portraying an unreal character, an exaggerated manner of the “school of representation” was employed, whereas actors in the real world worked within the psychological “school of transformation”. Through physical action, symbolic gestures and interaction with media images, the performance emphasised human dependence on social media and the loss of live emotional contact. The originality of this production lay in its dynamic approach to the audience’s perception of reality. In contrast, the following project, whose plot and form had a fundamentally different stage realisation, presented the psychology of experience through two parallel retrospective formats of stage interpretation – video fragmentation and live performance. An example of a one-act production in the Zoom format was the piece “The Heart of a Refugee” (Fig. 2).

The performance was constructed as a video monoperformance-confession of a single heroine who, through her personal story, reflected on the journey from pre-war calm to the tragic reality of war in Ukraine. Beginning with light irony and satirical self-criticism, the action gradually shifted towards deep emotional tension:

the heroine experienced displacement, encountered the indifference of the world, and came to a sharp awareness of the scale of the tragedy. According to the plot, the tempo and rhythm of the narrative intensified – the storyline depicted the experience of leaving home, saying farewell to loved ones, travelling by plane, forming new acquaintances, and for the first time posing the pressing question: does the world know that there is a war in Ukraine? This realisation of tragedy gave way to a stage of confusion and an inner emotional outburst: tension, astonishment and pain emerged on screen, the character addressed the audience directly, while mournful music accompanied images evoking the realities of war – sirens, explosions and loss. In the resolution, having endured an inner impasse, the heroine found the strength to inspire both herself and others to continue the struggle, and in the finale delivered a motivational speech about the resilience of the Ukrainian people, faith in victory and Ukraine's historical capacity not to surrender. The culmination of the entire production was this inner turning point and motivational self-persuasion, which evolved into a direct appeal to the audience grounded in belief in the unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian nation. The epilogue affirmed the ideas of resilience, unity and the inevitability of Ukraine's victory. This work possessed a profound inner meaning and a tragic compositional structure from beginning to end of the refugee's story, in contrast to "The Treasure of Jolly Roger", interpreted in the genre of an adventure comedy (Fig. 3).



Figure 2. Dramatic monoperformance
"The Heart of a Refugee"

Source: photo by the author



Figure 3. Phantasmagorical tale
"The Treasure of Jolly Roger"

Source: photo by the author

The phantasmagorical tale "The Treasure of Jolly Roger" emerged as a dynamic spectacular performance featuring vivid, colourful characters and active interaction with the audience. The plot was built around an engaging treasure hunt in which spectators became direct participants in the adventure, influencing the course of events through interactive tasks, questions and shared игрові episodes. An important principle of stage realisation was the use of experimental lighting effects: contrasting light-and-shadow transitions, impulsive flashes during stage combat scenes, cold and mystical tones to indicate an otherworldly space, as well as dynamic projections that created the illusion of phantasmagorical creatures. Light served not merely as a technical device, but as a fully-fledged dramatic tool that enhanced the magical atmosphere, accentuated the tension of the conflict, and created a sense of transition between the real and imaginary worlds. The director's approach was also based on the principle of spontaneous improvisation with the audience: the actors left room for live reactions, varying their intonation, tempo and even individual lines depending on the mood of the hall, which created an effect of co-creation and made each performance unique. In this way, the production became an interactive theatrical performance, combining play, fantasy, technological tools and direct emotional contact with the audience.

Thus, international and Ukrainian student creative projects demonstrated a diversity of concepts and implementation technologies – from Zoom performances and streaming productions to platforms resembling a "theatrical Netflix" and social media formats. The international context not only broadened the scope for comparison but also confirmed that Ukrainian student creative projects have developed within a shared European and global trend of digital theatre, where experimentation with form, space and media has become an essential component of theatrical education and culture as a whole. Notable examples included creative projects in which aspiring directors succeeded in realising a range of innovative stage concepts, including performances incorporating video projection, stage streams combining live action, the director's social stance and online communication with the audience, as well as screen-based visual compositions in which movement, sound and light are combined as equal components of the artistic image. A. Basler & I. Kriesi (2019), in their statements regarding adolescents' search for career guidance, noted that the development of aspirations for a future profession begins in the secondary education environment; this study draws a parallel here, as it shares similarities with the search for professional guidance among teenage students in student projects. These projects not only demonstrated a high level of professional training among students but also reflected the individuality of the future citizen, highlighting a trend towards the integration of digital technologies into the structure of contemporary theatrical performance, which has shaped a new format

of the audience experience. N. Kripchuk (2018) analysed the “open-air” performance space and its functionality in the creation of a contemporary theatrical show.

S. Krymsky (2003) noted that globalisation may be understood as a “new stage of sapiensisation”, as it centres on the formation of global information flows and socio-cultural concepts of personal expression. This has enabled the unification of humanity’s intellectual resources, creative capacities and a new form of digital existence within the internet dimension, providing access to accumulated knowledge and forming a kind of “planetary mind”. The projects studied showed that the integration of digital tools into stage practice not only expanded the audience but also made it possible to combine classical stage forms with modern media, creating new ways for the audience and the artist to interact. For students’ creative concepts, this opened up the prospect not merely of emulating foreign experience, but of adapting it to national specifics, cultural context and educational needs, serving both entertainment purposes and carrying ideological and conceptual weight, in the course of which the modern audience had the opportunity to perceive interpretations of life’s dogmas through the prism of high-quality and spectacular adaptations by young directors. It can be argued that the phenomenon of digital theatre has become not only a platform for experimentation and the development of creative skills, but also for the formation of a generation of artists capable of working at the intersection of theatre and digital technologies. At the same time, this direction requires extensive research and systematic adaptation in Ukraine in order to ensure that the integration of new formats is effective and meets the needs of both students and audiences. Understanding contemporary creative concepts of student projects in the field of spectacular theatrical events necessitates engagement with a broader range of theoretical approaches that interpret changes within the cultural and artistic environment. Thus, in the work of R. Greene (2000), it is emphasised that the development of science and rational thinking has gradually revealed many phenomena that were once perceived as incomprehensible or mystical. In the artistic sphere, such processes also gained relevance, as contemporary artists, particularly those studying creative disciplines, gained broader access to information resources, technologies and cultural heritage, which enabled them to innovatively reinterpret historical events and cultural phenomena within the framework of theatrical and performance events. In this context, R. Goldberg’s (2025) study also became significant, in which the author emphasised that contemporary performance practice had emerged at the intersection of various artistic disciplines – theatre, film, dance, new media and technologies – which described parallel opportunities for experimentation in student creative projects. S. Bay-Cheng (2007) noted that although most live performances depend on the influence of digital technologies,

the process of staging theatrical performances opened up broader opportunities for the transformation of creative approaches and directorial practices in contemporary theatre. S. Nur *et al.* (2025) investigated how digital technologies were transforming traditional Indonesian theatrical forms (ketoprak, drama gong, wayang purwa) at the levels of production, distribution and consumption. The authors demonstrated that digitalisation has expanded access and engagement with a global audience and helped preserve local cultural values, but at the same time has created risks of cultural gentrification and the erosion of authentic traditional aspects.

Research into the transformations of cultural space, as explored in the work of O. Kopyievska (2018), has also become crucial for understanding contemporary artistic processes. The researcher examined the socio-cultural changes that have shaped new models of cultural communication and their role in fostering innovative artistic practices. According to S. Yahodzinskyi (2015), such processes are directly linked to the resources available to society, as it is these resources that determine the possibilities for transforming society’s cultural vision. In this context, the research findings confirmed that the transformation of directorial approaches in student projects also depended to a significant extent on access to digital resources, media technologies and the opportunities offered by internet culture, which expanded the toolkit for creating contemporary performance forms. O. Starovoi (2017) emphasised that human innovation is a key factor in creating new solutions across various spheres of public life. In the arts, this aspect has become particularly relevant, as it is the creative potential of the individual that drives the search for new forms of artistic expression. I. Petrova (2007) noted that practical approaches, combined with theoretical ones, gradually shape cultural and artistic projects, and this allows student productions to be viewed as a space for creative experimentation, in which the innovative thinking of future directors is combined with the use of modern technologies and the digital possibilities of internet culture. Thus, digital technologies significantly influence the development of contemporary theatre art, opening up new opportunities for student creative projects and innovative approaches to staging performances. They facilitate the integration of various artistic disciplines, including theatre, dance and new media, whilst also enabling the preservation of cultural values, though this simultaneously carries the risk of losing authenticity. The transformation of directorial approaches and creative practices in student projects is closely linked to access to digital resources and media technologies.

Conclusions

The creative concepts of Ukrainian student projects within the context of internet culture of spectacular theatrical events involved a synthesis of traditional stage practices and the latest digital technologies. The

project “Love and Social Media?” explored the transformation of the nature of human emotions in the digital space through plastic and media performance. The video monopresentation-confession “Refugee” presented the personal experience of the protagonist as an artistic reflection on war, displacement and national resilience. The phantasmagorical tale “The Treasure of Jolly Roger” stood out for its interactive form, dynamic action and active audience engagement through the use of experimental lighting. Student artistic projects, under the influence of immersion in digital culture, gradually integrated into their practice the concepts of online broadcasting, VR and 3D technologies, social media and streaming platforms, which did not destroy the classical principles of stage activity but instead created new dimensions of artistic creativity. The analysis of the Polish project “Teatr Online”, the Czech project on the Divadelní Šílenci platform, and the Latvian Zoom performance “Sapraši un nesapraši” demonstrated that the integration of digital platforms and online formats has become an international trend. Ukrainian artistic groups can adapt these approaches in spectacular theatrical events, concert and theatrical activities, preserving national authenticity while simultaneously enhancing Ukraine’s cultural visibility in the world. Digital tools have not replaced

traditional theatre but have expanded its possibilities: the ephemerality of online content resonated with creative techniques on stage, such as the kaleidoscope effect, while the audience became an active participant in the event, engaging in shared play and stage action. For student projects, the focus is on the mechanism of combining traditional and transformative directing concepts, which opens up prospects for adapting international formats to national realities while preserving authenticity and creating new ways of communicating with audiences. Prospects for further research lie in a deeper analysis of the impact of digital platforms, interactive formats and immersive technologies on directing strategies, performance practices and educational models for training future professionals in the performing arts within a globalised cultural space.

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Викладач

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Творчі концепції студентських українських проєктів у вимірі інтернет-культури видовищно театралізованих заходів

■ **Анотація.** Метою статті було дослідження творчих концепцій студентських українських проєктів видовищно-театралізованих заходів у вимірі інтернет-культури. Методологія дослідження полягала у використанні описового, семіотичного та практичного підходів. Аналіз сучасних тенденцій взаємодії класичного театру з цифровими медіа та онлайн-платформами дозволило по-новому трактувати сценічне концептуальне середовище та виокремити корисні режисерські засоби художньої виразності. Нові шляхи практичного втілення сучасних студентських проєктів сприяли появі низки нових режисерських інструментів, методів організації художнього матеріалу, репетиційного процесу та механізмів втілення проєктів. Це дозволило підняти сценічне мистецтво на новий рівень розвитку культури. Було досліджено творчі експерименти молодих студентських колективів, оволодіння різноманітних сценічних виконавських технік, інтеграції нових технологій та розкриття творчого збереження національної ідентичності. Результати показали, що поєднання класичних театральних принципів із цифровими медіа сприяло підвищенню динамічності сценічної дії, режисерської ідейної спрямованості та ідейного бачення, активізації глядацького сприйняття та розширенню меж театрального простору в сучасному культурному світі. Творчі експерименти молодих студентських колективів продемонстрували впевнений рівень оволодіння різноманітними сценічними виконавськими техніками, інтеграцію мультимедійних засобів і цифрових форматів, прагнення до збереження та переосмислення національної культурної ідентичності в умовах глобалізації. Наведено приклади сучасних творчих проєктів видовищно театралізованих заходів та театрального мистецтва провідних українських режисерів, а також здійснено порівняння експериментальних концепцій з практиками digital theatre в Європі. Було проаналізовано перформенс «Кохання і соціальні мережі?», що акцентувало увагу на трансформації людських почуттів у цифровому середовищі та втраті безпосередньої емоційної комунікації, а також відеомоновиставу-сповідь «Біженка», у якій через особисту історію героя було осмислено шлях від довоєнної реальності до усвідомлення трагедії війни та ідеї незламності українського народу. Також, було проаналізовано фантасмагоричну казку «Скарб Веселого Роджера», особливістю якої стала динамічна дія, активна взаємодія з глядачем і використання експериментальних світлових ефектів як складової режисерської мови. Це дозволило окреслити перспективи подальшого розвитку сценічного мистецтва, окремих форм театрального мистецтва та визначити цифровізацію як важливий чинник сучасного культурного процесу

■ **Ключові слова:** режисерське трактування; digital theatre; творчі практики; виконавська техніка; українські режисери



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Visual narratives in museum exhibitions: Principles of formation

Abstract. This study aimed to determine the principles that govern the formation of visual narratives in museum exhibitions. This was achieved through a qualitative comparative and interpretative analysis of open-access scholarly, professional, and museum materials. Empirical material was gathered from four museums in Albania: the National Historical Museum of Albania, Bunk'Art, the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance and the Marubi National Museum of Photography. The study found that visual narratives are formed not by the individual expressiveness of exhibits, but by the coordinated interaction of object-based material, space, route, light, colour, graphics, explanatory text, attribution, archival materials, and modes of visitor perception. The main components of visual narratives in exhibitions were identified: exhibits, routes, spatial composition, lighting and colour design, graphic design, explanatory texts, navigation, photographs, archival materials, multimedia, architectural environments and interpretative contexts. Four models of visual storytelling were identified using Albanian museums as examples: national-historical, spatial-memorial, documentary-testimonial and photographic. The first model was based on chronology and historical artefacts, as well as the concept of cultural continuity. The second model was based on the architectural environment, the route, and the emotional impact of enclosed spaces. The third model was based on documents, technical surveillance objects, archival materials, and explanatory context. The fourth model was based on visual series, image attribution, and the representation of social memory. The principles of visual narrative formation were therefore established: thematic integrity, spatial sequence, visual hierarchy, cultural contextualisation, correspondence between form and content, emotional engagement, documentary reliability and interaction between the object-based, textual and visual-spatial levels of the exhibition. The practical significance of these findings lies in the potential application of the proposed models and principles in the analysis, design, and evaluation of museum exhibitions

Keywords: actor; cultural memory; exhibition route; visual hierarchy; museum storytelling; interpretative context; architectural environment; documentary reliability

Introduction

In cultural practice, the museum exhibition functions as both a space for displaying a collection and a system of visual storytelling. In this system, the exhibits, the route, the architectural environment, the light, the graphics and the explanatory text form a sequence through which the museum material is perceived. These elements – the exhibit, the route, the architectural environment, light, graphics, explanatory text, digital elements and the visitor's mode of movement – form a sequence of perception through which cultural material acquires an

interpretative structure. Consequently, the study of visual narrative is connected to the question of how museums translate objects, documents, images, and spatial solutions into coherent messages about memory, identity, historical experience, and artistic tradition.

Studies of museum technologies have examined the influence of digital tools on visitor experience and interaction with museum materials. Using Albanian museums as their case study, R. Dhora & S. Baraku (2022) examined how technologies can enhance the museum

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experience and boost audience engagement. The authors analysed how technological solutions can expand access to information and transform the way visitors interact with exhibitions. More broadly, in the context of the digital transformation of museum exhibitions, J. Li *et al.* (2024) categorised the technologies employed in museums. Their work examined interactive, immersive, and analytical solutions employed to modernise exhibition practices. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which digital technologies change the presentation of objects and the organisation of communication between museums and their audiences. D. Lacet *et al.* (2022) explored the problem of digital storytelling in virtual museums. The authors examined approaches to constructing narratives in virtual museum environments using images, texts, audiovisual materials, and interactive actions. Their review focused on the forms of digital storytelling used in virtual museums and how these organise user interaction.

H. Rosli & N. Kamaruddin (2020) studied the relationship between information visualisation and user experience in museum exhibitions. In their study, they examined digital storytelling through the lens of information visualisation and user perception. The authors proposed a conceptual framework linking museum information to types of visual representation and visitor experience. Interactive storytelling in the field of cultural heritage was analysed using design patterns of mobile augmented reality. A. Nikolarakis & P. Koutsabasis (2024) systematically reviewed solutions for storytelling in cultural heritage using mobile augmented reality. Their work examined methods of overlaying information onto objects, spatial navigation, and expanding context through mobile interfaces. F. Taormina & S. Bonini Baraldi (2022) considered the organisational consequences of the digitalisation of museum activity. In their review, they analysed digital technologies as a factor that transforms museum management, communication, work with collections, and interaction with audiences. The authors demonstrated that digitalisation impacts not only display methods, but also institutional processes within museums.

Studies of public and youth participation in the preservation of cultural memory have explored the Albanian context of cultural heritage. Using the city of Korça as their case study, E. Menkshi *et al.* (2021) examined the involvement of young people in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. They focused on the participation of the younger generation, how heritage is perceived as a social value, and the mechanisms for its popularisation. E. Dharmo & J. Canaj (2024) examined the role of civil society in the preservation and development of Albania's cultural heritage. The authors analysed the influence of civic initiatives on the preservation of cultural values and their inclusion in the country's development. In this study, heritage is presented as a means of public communication, identity, and cultural policy. I. Xheraj-Subashi (2025) examined the artistic and historical layers of Albanian heritage in a study devoted to the

ancient monuments and monumental reinterpretation of Durrës. The author examined the significance of monumental storytelling, and social values of ancient artefacts for the city's cultural heritage. The study documented the relationship between visual artefacts, the historical multi-layered nature of the region, and the local artistic tradition. The memorial dimension of Albanian museum spaces is addressed in the work by F. Gjepali (2025), in which Bunk'Art is considered a space of collective memory and a means of reinterpreting dissonant heritage. The author analyses how spaces from the communist period, originally used as bunkers, acquire new significance as museums. The study focuses on the processes of resemanticisation and aestheticisation, as well as the incorporation of traumatic heritage into the cultural landscape of Albania.

The studies considered reveal several areas related to museum communication and cultural heritage, including digital technologies, virtual museums, augmented reality, user experience, civic participation, the preservation of Albanian heritage, monumental painting, and memorial spaces. However, these works do not adequately systematise the interaction between objects, spaces, routes, light, colour, graphics, text, photography, archives and the architectural environment to form a unified visual narrative. The typology of museum visual storytelling is also not sufficiently explored through specific case studies in which national-historical, spatial-memorial, documentary-testimonial and photographic models can be compared.

The study aimed to reveal the mechanisms by which visual storytelling is formed in museum exhibitions. To this end, the study set out to: clarify the theoretical foundations for understanding visual narrative as a form of museum interpretation; determine the exhibition components through which object-based material, space, route, text, graphics, and the visual environment contribute to museum storytelling; compare museum case studies from Albania as different models of visual narrative; and generalise the principles of its formation in museum exhibitions.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted as a desk-based qualitative comparative and interpretative analysis. The research materials were divided into theoretical-methodological and empirical sources. The theoretical-methodological base consisted of scholarly publications on museology, museum communication, exhibition design, visual culture, cultural memory, heritage interpretation, and visitor experience. These sources were used to clarify the concepts of visual narrative, exhibition route, visual hierarchy, interpretative text, spatial composition, and museum storytelling.

The empirical source base consisted of publicly available official materials from four museums in Albania: the National Historical Museum of Albania, Bunk'Art,

the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance and the Marubi National Museum of Photography. The analysis included official museum pages, descriptions of permanent exhibitions and thematic sectors, materials from digital collections, photographs of exhibition halls, and images of individual objects in the museums' collections. For the National Historical Museum of Albania, materials from the Pavilion of Antiquity section were used, including an image of the "Head of Apollo" sculpture. For Bunk'Art, materials from Bunk'Art 1 were analysed, including the image Bunk'Art (n.d.). For the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance (n.d.), materials from Sector 01: Bugs and Other Creatures were used. Materials from the Permanent Exhibition were analysed for the Marubi National Museum of Photography (n.d.a; n.d.b). The research logic comprised three consecutive stages.

In the first stage, the concept of visual narrative in museum exhibitions was clarified theoretically and conceptually. The unit of analysis was an individual theoretical proposition related to museum exhibitions, visual culture, cultural memory, representation, and interpretation. At this stage, visual narrative was considered a system of connections between objects, space, text and images through which museums organise the perception of cultural material. The second stage involved conducting a structural-semiotic analysis of the means by which exhibition narrative is formed. The unit of analysis was an individual exhibition component as a carrier of visual or semantic meaning. This covered the exhibition itself, the visitor route, the spatial composition, the lighting and colour design, the graphic design, the explanatory text, the navigation, and how object-based material is related to the interpretative context. Open-access images of museum objects and exhibition spaces were used to analyse exhibit attribution, visual hierarchisation, the relationship between objects and explanatory texts, spatial context, and museum storytelling models. The third stage involved a case analysis of Albanian museum exhibitions. The purposive case sample included the National Historical Museum of Albania, Bunk'Art, the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance and the Marubi National Museum of Photography, which were selected as examples of different museum storytelling models: national-historical, spatial-memorial, documentary-testimonial and photographic. The unit of analysis was the museum exhibition as an integral visual-spatial system. The thematic structure, types of exhibits, route, visual organisation, relationship between object-based material and explanatory text, use of photographs, documents, archives, graphics and multimedia, and architectural environment were analysed in each case. Museums for which there were insufficient open-access materials with which to analyse the exhibition structure were excluded from the sample.

A unified analytical matrix was used for the comparison. The main categories of analysis were: the type of visual narrative; the object-based foundation of the

storytelling; spatial organisation; visitor route; visual hierarchy; the role of text, graphics, light and colour; the nature of cultural contextualisation; and the connection of the exhibition to memory, identity or artistic heritage. Thematic coding was then used to group these features into the following principles of visual narrative formation: thematic integrity; spatial sequence; visual hierarchy; cultural contextualisation; correspondence between form and content; emotional engagement; documentary reliability; and interaction between the object-based, textual, and visual-spatial levels. The reliability of the analysis was ensured through repeated review of the materials, comparison of categories across cases, and verification of the stability of the identified features.

Results

Visual narrative as a form of museum interpretation

In a museum exhibition, visual narrative is not determined by the number of objects presented, but by the way in which they are incorporated into a system of semantic connections. An exhibition takes on an interpretative function when the material features, provenance, visual expressiveness, and spatial positioning of its artefacts are aligned with the overarching display logic. An archaeological vessel placed in a showcase as an isolated object is primarily perceived as a material trace of the past. However, the same object included in a sequence with a settlement map, a reconstruction of a dwelling, fragments of ornamentation, and an explanation of everyday practices begins to function as part of a narrative about the way of life of a particular culture. A military uniform in a separate showcase merely signifies a historical period, but when combined with a personal letter, a photograph of the owner, a map of military operations and an excerpt from their memoirs, it becomes part of a biographical and memorial narrative. In this sense, the museum exhibition acts as an organised form of cultural communication in which the sequence of objects, the spatial structure, the explanatory text, the visual accents, and the visitor's movement all contribute to the visitor's experience (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; International Council of Museums, 2022). Visual narrative is constructed through the combination of object-based, spatial and interpretative elements. The object-based line is connected to which objects are included in the exhibition and the cultural information they convey. The spatial line determines the order in which visitors encounter these objects, as well as the halls, transitions, showcases, lighting and scale relationships that establish the logic of perception. The interpretative narrative is formed through the use of texts, captions, graphics, multimedia elements and archival materials, as well as the juxtaposition of exhibits. In a historical museum, for example, the chronological arrangement of documents, weapons, maps and portraits can provide insight into the development of political events over time. In an art museum, juxtaposing works from different periods of an

artist's career creates a narrative of creative evolution. Changes in colour, composition and subject matter become visual evidence of artistic exploration. Therefore, visual narrative does not coincide with simple chronology or the thematic division of galleries; rather, it arises when museum material is organised as a system of cultural interpretation.

An exhibition object is not a self-sufficient source of meaning. Its meaning depends on selection, proximity to other objects, mode of placement, scale of display, and explanatory context. A historical document placed in a showcase without connection to a spatial scenario is perceived as an archival fragment. However, the same document included in a sequence of photographs, personal belongings, maps, testimonies and thematic texts begins to function as an element of a narrative about a particular era, social group or traumatic experience. Similarly, a photograph of a city street may be read as an individual visual document, but as part of a series containing images of craft workshops, family portraits, festive scenes, and architectural fragments, it becomes part of a story about urban culture, social memory, and changes to the everyday environment. Consequently, visual narratives are formed not by the objects themselves, but by systems of exhibition relationships that transform them from material items into cultural testimonies (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Macdonald, 2013). Visual narratives transmit information and establish how it is to be read. Visitors enter exhibitions as participants in the interpretative process, and their perception is shaped by factors such as the route, the rhythm of changing objects, the visual density of the halls, the contrast between open and enclosed spaces, the nature of the lighting, the density of texts, and the degree of emotional impact. In a memorial exhibition, for example, a narrow corridor, subdued lighting and a limited colour scheme, combined with the fragmentary placement of documents, can create a sense of pressure and the impossibility of gaining a complete overview. In a science and technology museum, an open layout, interactive elements, large-scale diagrams and the sequential arrangement of models form a narrative of discovery, experimentation and rational explanation. In a photography museum, series of images set the rhythm of perception: portraits, urban scenes, family groups and documentary frames enable visitors to move from individual faces to a broader picture of society (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Distinguishing between visual narrative and visual design enables to define the function of exhibition form more precisely. Design is connected with the external organisation of the display, including the colour of the walls, the typeface used, the showcases, the lighting and the graphic panels. Visual narrative incorporates these elements but is not reducible to them since its purpose is to facilitate the transition from visual perception to cultural understanding. The dark lighting in a memorial museum is not just a design choice; it creates an

atmosphere of enclosure, pressure and historical trauma. Similarly, a chronological route in a historical museum is not just a navigational tool; it provides an understanding of how the state, society or cultural tradition developed. Similarly, a photographic sequence serves not only an illustrative function; through the succession of images, it can also reconstruct social memory, everyday life, corporeality, and the visual appearance of an era.

The connection between visual narrative and cultural memory is evident in the fact that a museum exhibition selects objects and the manner in which they are to be remembered. The same historical period can be presented as a sequence of political events, a history of everyday life, a traumatic experience, artistic heritage or a process of national identity formation. When the emphasis is placed on national history, chronology, symbolic objects, maps, portraits, documents and state symbols predominate. Conversely, when the focus is on the memory of violence, enclosed spaces, testimonies, personal belongings, archival materials and emotionally charged visual solutions take centre stage. When the focus is on photography as a cultural document, the central element is the visual encounter with images of people, cities, costumes, gestures and social practices, rather than the route through events. A series of portraits may reveal not only how people appeared, but also the structure of the social hierarchy through clothing, posture, background, professional attributes, and family arrangements within the frame (Macdonald, 2013). A visual narrative plays a key role in shaping identity. In a museum exhibition, identity is not stated outright, but emerges through recurring images, symbols, spatial accents and the selection of key artefacts. Identities such as national, urban, social, artistic or professional may be represented through artefacts, documents, photographs, reconstructions, multimedia testimonies and the architectural environment. Connecting archaeological objects, historical documents, images of public figures and contemporary interpretative texts in an exhibition creates an idea of continuity. Conversely, if an exhibition focuses on ruptures, fragments, traces of destruction or testimonies of control, it conveys a different type of identity, based on memories of crisis, violence or loss. In an art museum, identity may be formed through the canon, including the selection of works, the positioning of key artists, highlighting a national school and comparing local and European artistic traditions (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Falk & Dierking, 2016).

A museum exhibition is characterised by the fact that visual narratives can be constructed in different ways. The chronological mode is used when the material is organised as a sequence of historical periods, events, or stages of artistic development. The memorial mode is built around traces of loss, violence, trauma or collective experience; therefore, spatial tension, documentary character and emotional density are intensified within it. The documentary mode relies on archives, testimonies,

photographs, technical objects and textual explanations to confirm the reliability of the presented material. In the photographic mode, visual series are formed, in which the image becomes the main carrier of social, urban, family or national memory. The artistic mode connects works through style, composition, authorial manner, iconography, or affiliation with a particular school. In a museum exhibition, the chronological, memorial, documentary, photographic and artistic modes may be combined. However, one mode usually determines the order in which materials are arranged, the visitor's route, and the method of interpreting the exhibits (Macdonald, 2013). Consequently, the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is defined as the organisation of cultural material,

where objects, space, images, texts and visitor routes form a coherent interpretive system. The outcome is not only the transmission of information about the past, art or heritage, but also the formation of a particular mode of perception: chronological, memorial, documentary, photographic, artistic or a combination of these. Therefore, when analysing a museum exhibition, it is necessary to consider not the expressiveness of individual exhibits, but how they are included in the overall visual, spatial and semantic structure (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; International Council of Museums, 2022). Figure 1 shows how museum material is transformed into a visual narrative through the organisation of exhibitions and interpretative perception.

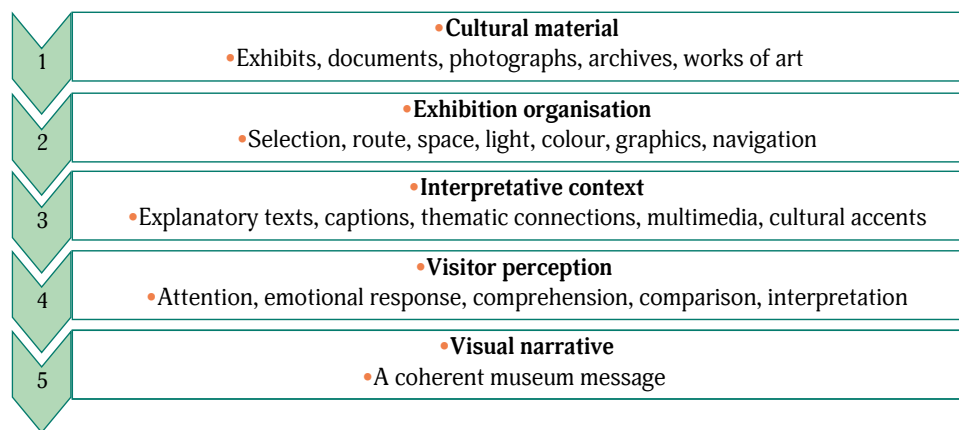


Figure 1. Levels of visual narrative formation in a museum exhibition

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of International Council of E. Hooper-Greenhill (2000), S. Macdonald (2013), J. Falk & L. Dierking (2016), International Council of Museums (2022)

Figure 1 shows that the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is formed through the transition from cultural material to interpretative effect. Exhibits, documents, photographs, archives and works of art do not acquire a narrative function in isolation, but rather through a combination of factors including selection, route, spatial composition, light, colour, graphics, explanatory texts and visitor perception. The diagram shows that a coherent museum message only arises through the coordinated interaction of the object-based, exhibition, interpretative and perceptual levels.

Therefore, visual narrative can be considered a mechanism for transforming museum material into a culturally meaningful message. Its formation depends not only on the content of the exhibits, but also on how they are arranged, juxtaposed and visually emphasised within an interpretative context. According to this understanding, a museum exhibition is not a static display of objects, but rather a system of sequential meaning-making in which objects, spaces, images, texts and visitor routes jointly establish the logic of perception. This enables to analyse the specific exhibition components through which visual narrative acquires a stable structure and becomes accessible to interpretation by visitors.

Exhibition components in the formation of visual narrative

The formation of a visual narrative in a museum exhibition depends on how the individual elements of the display are incorporated into the overall perception of the exhibition. An exhibition's route, space, light, colour, graphics, explanatory text and navigation do not automatically create a narrative; each component acquires a narrative function only when included in a sequential presentation of the material. For instance, an archaeological object in an isolated display case primarily serves to demonstrate the preservation of a material artefact. However, when combined with a settlement map, a reconstruction of a dwelling, fragments of ornamentation, and an explanation of everyday practices, it begins to be perceived as part of a story about daily life. Similarly, a historical photograph placed next to a personal letter, a fragment of clothing and a document acquires illustrative and testimonial significance. Therefore, an exhibition component becomes narrative not by virtue of its form, but by virtue of the function it performs in revealing cultural meaning (Dean, 2002). The exhibition serves as the starting point of the visual narrative, but its meaning depends on the system of connections in which it is presented.

One and the same object may support different types of storytelling. In a historical museum, a military uniform may form part of a narrative about statehood when displayed alongside symbols of power, maps and official documents. However, the same uniform could form part of a biographical narrative if displayed alongside a photograph of its owner, personal letters, information about their fate, and the context of a specific event. Likewise, in an art exhibition, a work is not limited to its own aesthetic form: a painting displayed alongside sketches, later versions of the composition, and archival materials reveals not only the finished result, but also the artistic exploration process. Consequently, the object-based foundation of visual narrative is formed through the correlation of the object with context, rather than through its simple inclusion in the exhibition (Serrell, 2015).

The route determines the order in which the museum's message is revealed. If visitors encounter objects without a clear sequence, their perception becomes fragmented: each exhibit is viewed in isolation, and the general theme breaks down into a series of independent impressions. However, with a carefully designed route, the exhibition begins to function as a story, with each successive room either clarifying or complicating the previous one. In a national history museum, for example, a linear route could take visitors from ancient times to the present, providing an overview of the development of the state, culture, and social institutions. In a memorial museum, however, the route is often constructed differently, not as a calm progression through chronology, but as a gradual intensification of emotional tension. For example, entering through a narrow corridor and progressing to documents, personal testimonies, and finally a zone of reflection provides not only knowledge of an event, but also an experience of its consequences. In this case, the route performs a dramaturgical rather than technical function (Lord & Dexter, 2002). The spatial composition determines exactly how the visitor enters the visual narrative. Open halls allow visitors to compare objects, see connections between themes, and revisit material they have already seen. Conversely, enclosed rooms, narrow passages and sequential transitions create a sense of directed movement, control or limited choice. In an art museum, a large work placed in the centre of a hall or on the visual axis of the entrance acquires the status of a semantic centre, even if the accompanying text does not emphasise this directly. In an ethnographic exhibition, a reconstructed room, workshop, or part of a dwelling changes how objects are perceived; dishes, clothing, tools, and furniture are not seen as individual museum pieces, but as parts of a way of life. In a memorial exhibition, space itself may become a carrier of memory: a basement, cell, bunker or corridor not only contains exhibits, but also reproduces the physical sensation of historical experience. Therefore, space should not be regarded as a neutral shell of the exhibition (Serrell, 2015).

Light and colour serve to regulate semantics and emotions. Directed light draws attention to a specific object, creating a hierarchy; diffused lighting provides an even perception; and dimming intensifies the sense of archival quality, enclosure or loss. In an exhibition on political violence, for example, subdued lighting can reinforce the documentary and commemorative nature of the material, particularly when personal files, surveillance equipment, photographs and testimonies are displayed in close proximity. By contrast, in a science and technology museum, more open lighting, light surfaces and clear diagrams support a narrative of rational explanation. Colour works in a similar way: a dark palette may be associated with memory, trauma, or a closed historical experience; a neutral palette with a documentary character; and a contrasting palette with the division of thematic sections. It is the correspondence of colour and light to the content of the exhibition that creates the narrative effect, not the colours or light themselves. Graphic design translates the structure of the exhibition into a visual system that is easy to understand. Headings, diagrams, maps, timelines, pictograms and colour markers help visitors distinguish between main themes, supplementary information and directions. In a historical exhibition, for example, a timeline helps visitors relate individual documents or objects to a broader sequence of events. In a photography museum, grouping images by author, period, urban space or social type transforms a photographic archive into a visual history of society. In a memorial museum, strict typography, a limited colour scheme and the absence of decorative embellishments reinforce the documentary nature of the material. However, if graphics are merely decorative, they do not strengthen the narrative. However, if they help construct a hierarchy of information, they become part of the narrative (Piehl, 2020).

Explanatory text links visual perception with cultural meaning. A caption for an exhibition piece should not merely state the title, date and material; it should also explain why the piece is included in the exhibition and what role it plays in the overall theme. For instance, an old household object may be perceived as an ethnographic detail without explanation, but a text about how it was used and its connection with family labour or ritual practice would transfer it into a social and cultural context. In an art museum, an explanation may reveal a technique, compositional device or connection with the period, or demonstrate a change in the artist's style. In a memorial exhibition, text often functions as testimony; a short quotation, fragment of a letter or archival document can have a greater impact than a lengthy descriptive passage. Therefore, text must be proportionate to the visual material: excessive explanation can overwhelm the exhibit, while insufficient explanation can leave its meaning unclear (Serrell, 2015). Navigation supports the sequence of museum storytelling. Its function is broader than merely indicating direction. Room numbers, colour

codes, route diagrams and recurring graphic signs help visitors understand the connections between themes. In a chronological exhibition, navigation maintains temporal logic; in a thematic exhibition, it distinguishes semantic blocks; and in a multimedia exhibition, it connects the physical exhibit with its digital supplement. For instance, if a museum section comprises display cases containing documents, an interactive map and video testimonies, the navigation system should demonstrate the semantic connection between these materials as well as the path of movement. Without such connections, even a content-rich exhibition may be perceived as a set of separate information nodes. Consequently, navigation ensures orientation in space and the preservation of narrative integrity (Lord & Dexter, 2002).

Multimedia elements can strengthen a visual narrative, but only when they complement the sequence of objects rather than replace it. Video, sound, projections, digital archives and interactive screens can be used to demonstrate movement, voice, processes and lost contexts, or to present multiple testimonies. In a photography museum, for example, a digital archive can provide greater access to the collection, but physical prints preserve scale, materiality and direct visual contact. Similarly, in a historical exhibition, a multimedia map can illustrate border changes or population movements, but its meaning is only fully realised through its connection with documents, artefacts and explanatory texts. In a memorial space, audio testimony can intensify the personal dimension of history, provided it does not become an independent emotional effect, detached from the exhibits. Therefore, multimedia becomes a narrative component only when it is incorporated into the overall display structure. The interpretative context

unites exhibition components into a coherent semantic framework. The same set of materials can form different narratives, depending on the chosen central logic. For example, photographs from the early twentieth century could reveal the history of photographic technology, urban everyday life, social hierarchy, national memory, or family culture. Similarly, objects of traditional daily life may support narratives of craft, gender roles, regional identity, or changes in the everyday environment. Documents of political control can be presented as archival sources. However, when combined with technical surveillance devices, a darkened space, personal stories and a directed route, they form a narrative of fear, control and loss of privacy. Therefore, the composition of the exhibition and the way its components are connected are both decisive. The interaction between these components demonstrates that visual narratives are not created by the mere accumulation of exhibits, texts and design solutions. Without a route, an exhibit remains a separate object; without semantic accents, a route becomes a movement scheme; without connection to the theme, light is perceived as design; without visual support, text becomes a reference insert. Narrative arises when these components support one another: objects provide material, space organises encounters with them, light and colour highlight semantic centres, graphics and text clarify interpretations, navigation maintains sequences and multimedia expands the boundaries of perception. This structure enables exhibitions to display objects and form sequential cultural histories that can be interpreted visually, spatially and intellectually (Dean, 2002; Piehl, 2020). Table 1 summarises how individual exhibition elements transition from display to forming museum storytelling.

Table 1. Exhibition components and their narrative functions

Exhibition component	Function in the structure of the exhibition	Narrative effect
Exhibit	Provides the object-based foundation of display and fixes the material carrier of cultural meaning	Transforms cultural material into a visible object of storytelling
Exhibition route	Organises the sequence of engagement with themes, rooms and objects	Forms a sense of history unfolding in time or space
Spatial composition	Determines the arrangement of objects, scale, distance and character of movement	Creates the dramaturgy of perception and highlights central semantic zones
Lighting design	Accentuates key objects, regulates visibility and emotional atmosphere	Strengthens the significance of individual fragments and sets the tone of interpretation
Colour design	Divides thematic blocks, supports visual integrity and emotional mode	Helps distinguish semantic zones and links visual form with content
Graphic design	Organises headings, diagrams, maps, timelines, pictograms and visual markers	Makes the structure of the exhibition readable and supports visual hierarchy
Explanatory text	Reveals the provenance, context and meaning of exhibits	Translates visual perception into cultural interpretation
Navigation	Directs the visitor's movement and maintains the logic of transitions between blocks	Preserves the sequence of museum storytelling
Photographs and archival materials	Introduce a documentary, visual or testimonial dimension into the exhibition	Create an effect of historical reliability and connection with memory

Table 1, Continued

Exhibition component	Function in the structure of the exhibition	Narrative effect
Multimedia	Expands the object sequence through sound, video, digital archives and interactive elements	Complements static display with a dynamic or multi-layered mode of perception
Architectural environment	Connects the exhibition with the physical space of the building or historical site	Turns space into an independent carrier of narrative
Interpretative context	Unites objects, texts, images and space within a single semantic framework	Forms a coherent museum message

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of D. Dean (2002), B. Lord & G. Dexter (2002), B. Serrell (2015), J. Piehl (2020)

Table 1 showed that exhibition components perform an organisational function and a narrative function. The exhibition route, space, lighting, colours, graphics, explanatory texts, navigation, archival materials, multimedia and architectural environment all contribute to forming the museum's message, but only when incorporated into the overall perception structure. The most pronounced narrative function is found in components that direct the visitor's attention, establish a reading sequence and connect object-based material with cultural context simultaneously.

Therefore, the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is formed through the coordinated interaction of object-based, spatial, textual, and visual-graphic elements. No single component provides a coherent narrative in isolation: exhibits require context, routes require semantic logic, spaces require interpretative direction and texts and graphics require connection to the object sequence. When used coherently, these elements transform the demonstration of museum material into sequential cultural communication that is accessible to visual, spatial, and intellectual perception. This enables exhibition narrative to be regarded as a structured system, in which each element performs a specific function while supporting the overall logic of museum interpretation.

Models of visual storytelling in museum exhibitions: The case of Albania

Museum exhibitions in Albania demonstrate various approaches to visual storytelling, which differ in terms of the dominant carrier of meaning, spatial organisation, and the nature of the interpretative impact. At the National Historical Museum of Albania, for example, the carrier is the historical artefact, which is incorporated into a chronological and thematic sequence. At Bunk'Art, the narrative is constructed through the bunker's architectural space, where the route, enclosed environment and underground atmosphere become part of the perception of the past. At the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance, the narrative is formed through documents, technical surveillance devices, archival materials, and thematic rooms that visualise the system of control. At the Marubi National Museum of Photography, the photographic image forms the basis of the narrative, revealing social history, the urban environment, family culture and visual identity. At the National Historical Museum of Albania, visual narratives

are constructed as national-historical models in which chronology is combined with material evidence of the past. This type of exhibition organises historical material not as a set of separate objects, but as a sequence of cultural and political stages. Archaeological artefacts reveal the antiquity of a cultural layer, while documents and maps connect events to territory. Images of historical figures and symbolic objects provide insight into political and cultural continuity. When an archaeological artefact is displayed alongside a map, an environmental reconstruction or an explanation of social practices, it is no longer perceived solely as an ancient object, but rather as visual evidence of historical origin. This creates a transition from the material object to the image of national history.

The National Historical Museum of Albania's chronological structure determines both the order of movement and the way in which the past is interpreted. Visitors perceive history as a connected line, with each subsequent thematic section building on the previous one. Ancient artefacts provide an insight into origins, while materials from later periods demonstrate the evolution of social and political structures. Documents and symbolic artefacts further reinforce the notion of institutional continuity. In this model, visual hierarchy is formed by highlighting key periods, large artefacts, cartographic materials, and objects connected with statehood. A map placed next to a document translates a historical event from a factual level to a spatial process, while state symbolism connects a specific period to a broader collective memory. The relationship between exhibits and explanatory texts at the National Historical Museum of Albania provides cultural context for historical material. The object itself records a material trace, but the text connects it to an era, event, territory, or social practice. A document takes on a more precise meaning when included in a thematic block relating to political change or cultural transformation. A map becomes more than just a graphic representation of territory; it shows the movement of a historical process. Similarly, a portrait or symbolic object acquires a narrative function when correlated with a specific historical role, social conflict, or stage in the formation of national identity. Therefore, the national-historical model relies on thematic integrity, incorporating individual objects into the broader narrative of historical storytelling. Figure 2 presents an example of the visual interpretation of an ancient object.



Figure 2. “Head of Apollo” in the pavilion of antiquity exhibition of the National Historical Museum of Albania
Source: Pavilion of Antiquity (n.d.)

Figure 2 shows how a single ancient artefact can be incorporated into a national-historical model of storytelling by combining visual expressiveness with dating, provenance, and museum attribution. The visual form of the artefact enables it to be recognised as artistic evidence of an ancient cultural period, while the attributive information links the exhibit to a particular historical era and geographical location. Through this combination, the artefact is not merely an isolated museum item, but becomes part of a broader narrative of historical continuity.

Bunk’Art is a spatial-memorial model of visual narrative in which architecture is the primary means of storytelling. The bunker environment shapes the visitor’s perception even before they analyse documents, photographs or explanatory materials. Its underground location, enclosed corridors, limited visibility, dense sequence of transitions and imposing structures create a physical sense of enclosed space. In such an exhibition, the architecture does not function as a neutral shell since it is connected to the histories of secrecy, defence, political anxiety, and institutional control. The documents, photographs and technical objects within this space are not perceived as separate museum materials, but as elements of an environment that carries a memorial significance. In Bunk’Art, a visual hierarchy is formed through the route taken, the lighting and the spatial pressure experienced. Narrow passages direct movement, while individual rooms provide spaces for reflection. Subdued lighting draws attention to documents and photographs, and limited visibility encourages more focused perception. While an official document or photograph from the political period might be viewed as a historical artefact in an ordinary exhibition hall, inside the bunker it becomes part of the experience of a closed system. Doors, corridors, technical rooms, interior fragments and engineering details become elements of visual storytelling. Here, space does not illustrate the theme, but presents it through its physical form. The emotional impact of Bunk’Art is formed not through the direct description of traumatic experiences, but through the accumulation of spatial and documentary cues. The route inside the

bunker gradually immerses visitors in an environment of political closure. The limited colour scheme, subdued lighting, density of materials and weight of the architectural form all serve to strengthen the sense of isolation. Documents and photographs establish historical reliability, but how they are perceived is determined not only by their content, but also by where they are presented. In this case, therefore, the principle of correspondence between form and content is manifested through the coincidence of theme and environment: the closed nature of the political system is revealed through an enclosed architectural space. Figure 3 shows how the enclosed space of the bunker becomes an independent carrier of the museum’s narrative.

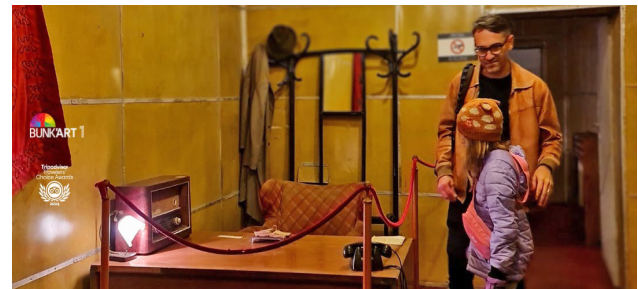


Figure 3. Bunk’Art 1 as an example of the spatial-memorial organisation of museum narrative
Source: Bunk’Art (n.d.)

The architectural environment of Bunk’Art is incorporated into a spatial-memorial storytelling model through features such as the enclosed room, limited visibility and object-based interior details, as well as the directed visitor route. The visual organisation of the space demonstrates that the bunker environment is not merely a neutral backdrop to the exhibits; it is a mode of perceiving historical experience in itself. Objects, lighting, colour restraint and spatial isolation reinforce the link between the physical structure of the room and the concept of political closure.

The House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance (n.d.) employs a documentary-testimonial model of visual storytelling. Here, the central element is not broad historical chronology, but rather the surveillance mechanism and its impact on private life. Technical devices, archival documents, photographs, thematic materials and explanatory texts present the system of control as a set of material and institutional traces. A surveillance device demonstrates the technical side of monitoring, while a document records the language of power, archival material shows the administrative form of control, and a photograph or personal testimony brings the theme closer to human experience. The narrative of such an exhibition is built through evidentiary force rather than symbolic generalisation. In the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance, the exhibition and explanatory text form a unified testimonial structure. Without context, a

technical object could be perceived merely as part of the history of equipment; however, when placed alongside documents, descriptions of surveillance methods and archival materials, it takes on socio-cultural significance. According to this logic, a listening device becomes visual evidence of interference in private communication, not merely a device. If the means of its practical application are presented nearby, a document with administrative wording ceases to be a neutral archival text. The interaction between the text and the object translates the technical material into a narrative about everyday control, fear, and violations of personal boundaries. The House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance (n.d.) presents control as a system of interconnected practices through thematic organisation. Visitors encounter a sequence of materials showing who carried out surveillance, what means were used, what data was recorded, and how this affected everyday life, rather than a single object. Lighting, documentary graphics, a limited colour palette and the layout of the rooms create an impression of archival reliability. The emotional effect is created through restraint in presentation: fear and control are conveyed not through dramatic embellishment, but through the material traces of surveillance. The guiding principle of this model is documentary reliability, supplemented by precise interpretative connections between objects, texts and spaces. Figure 4 illustrates how technical surveillance methods become part of a documentary-testimonial museum narrative.



Figure 4. Sector 01: Bugs and other tools as an example of documentary-testimonial narrative
Source: House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance (n.d.)

The documentary-testimonial model of museum narrative incorporates technical means of surveillance by connecting the exhibit to the themes of control and archival reliability. The visual representation of the equipment enables it to be perceived as both a technical object and material evidence of surveillance practices. The exhibition context connects the device with documents, the thematic room, and the broader system of institutional surveillance. Consequently, the technical object assumes a testimonial function, becoming part of a narrative about interference in private communication and everyday life.

The Marubi National Museum of Photography (n.d.a) presents a photographic model of visual narrative in

which images are the main carriers of cultural memory. Here, photography plays a central role in representing faces, gestures, clothing, interiors, urban spaces, social roles and forms of public self-presentation, rather than performing an auxiliary illustrative function. Unlike a historical exhibition, where storytelling is often constructed through a sequence of events, this model operates through series, comparisons, and recurring visual motifs. Portraits, family photographs, urban views and documentary shots do not form a single linear history, but rather a multi-layered image of society. At the Marubi National Museum of Photography, individual photographs and photographic series perform different narrative functions. A single portrait captures a particular person's appearance, including their posture, clothing, facial expression and manner of self-presentation. A series of portraits from different periods reveals changes in social norms, visual status, family structure, gender roles and urban culture. Urban photography may document architectural features, but in a series, it tells a story about the transformation of streets, public spaces, trade, movement and everyday routes. Family photographs not only depict private life, but also demonstrate forms of kinship, generational ties and the visual conventions of social presentation. The Marubi National Museum of Photography's attribution and graphic organisation ensure the transition from visual impression to historical reading. While a photograph possesses visual autonomy, without information such as the date, the name of the author, the place where it was taken and details about the subject or thematic context, it remains an open image. Captions and grouping by author, period, genre, urban motif or social type transform the image into the structure of a cultural archive. When compared with other portraits, a female portrait reveals changes in clothing, posture, accessories and social expectations. Similarly, an urban view, when examined thematically, reveals not only architecture, but also the rhythm of public life. Therefore, photographic narrative is built on the combination of visual expressiveness, historical attribution and cultural contextualisation. Figure 5 presents an example of a photographic portrait, revealing the connection between the image, its attribution and social memory.



Figure 5. A photographic portrait as a form of visual interpretation of social memory
Source: Marubi National Museum of Photography (n.d.b)

Photography takes on a narrative function when visual images are combined with attributive support. A portrait not only records an individual's features, but also elements of their social representation, such as posture, clothing, gestures, facial expressions and modes of self-presentation. In an exhibition context, these features enable the image to be regarded as a testimony to a particular environment, time, and form of public identity. The serial arrangement of photographs strengthens this effect, as an individual photograph is perceived in relation to other images, social types and visual codes of the period.

At the Marubi National Museum of Photography, visual hierarchy is created not through a single central object, but through repetition and seriality. Visitors read meaning through comparisons of faces, costumes, gestures, spaces, objects and social situations. While chronology may be preserved in such an exhibition, it is not the only way of organising the material. The photographic archive enables history to be presented as a series of visual testimonies, in which images of individuals, families, streets or urban landscapes become part of a broader cultural memory. The leading principle of this model is cultural contextualisation through visual series. Comparing the four cases revealed different centres of semantic organisation within visual narratives. At the National Historical Museum of Albania, for example, the centre is the historical artefact incorporated into a chronological and thematic sequence. At Bunk'Art, the centre is the

architectural space, which contains the exhibition and determines how the past is experienced. In the House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance, documentary and technical evidence takes centre stage, revealing the control system. At the Marubi National Museum of Photography, the photographic image plays a leading role, becoming a form of cultural memory through series and attribution. The visual narrative in these models is determined by which component becomes the main carrier of meaning, and by how the other elements support its function. The differences between these cases highlight several consistent principles in the development of visual storytelling in museums. The national-historical model relies on thematic integrity and historical sequence. The spatial-memorial model is based on the correspondence between architectural form and content, and emotional engagement through the environment. The documentary-testimonial model requires evidentiary value, precise attribution, and a connection between the object and its explanatory context. The photographic model is based on visual series, image comparisons and cultural contextualisation. While these principles can be combined within a single exhibition, in each of the examined museums, one principle becomes dominant and determines the character of visual storytelling. Table 2 summarises the dominant narrative carriers, methods of visual hierarchisation, role of text and attribution, and interpretative effects identified in the Albanian museum cases.

Table 2. Principles of visual narrative formation in museum cases

Museum case	Dominant carrier of narrative	How visual hierarchy is formed	Role of text and attribution	Emotional and interpretative effect	Identified principle
National Historical Museum of Albania	Historical artefact, document, map, symbolic object	Through the highlighting of historical periods, key artefacts and thematic transitions	Connects the object with an era, territory, event and cultural continuity	Forms a perception of history as the sequential development of national culture	Thematic integrity and historical sequence
Bunk'Art	Architectural space of the bunker, documents, photographs, environmental elements	Through an enclosed route, limited visibility, subdued light and spatial pauses	Clarifies the historical context of political closure and institutional control	Creates a sense of pressure, isolation, secrecy and memorial immersion	Correspondence between form and content
House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance	Document, technical surveillance device, archival testimony	Through thematic rooms and the juxtaposition of technology, documents and personal materials	Transforms the technical object into testimony to the social practice of control	Visualises fear, surveillance, violation of privacy and the everyday operation of dictatorship	Documentary reliability and interpretative precision
Marubi National Museum of Photography	Photographic image, portrait, series, urban view	Through serial arrangement, thematic grouping and comparison of images	Provides dating, authorship, place of shooting and socio-cultural context	Forms a perception of photography as a carrier of social history and visual identity	Cultural contextualisation through the visual series

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of House of Leaves/Museum of Secret Surveillance (n.d.), Marubi National Museum of Photography (n.d.a; n.d.b)

Table 2 showed that visual narratives in the examined museum cases are formed through different dominant carriers of meaning. In one case, the narrative is organised around a historical artefact and a chronological sequence. In another, it is organised through the architectural environment and route. In a third case, it is organised through documentary and technical testimony. In a fourth case, it is organised through a photographic image and a visual series. These differences are not only manifested in the type of museum material, but also in the methods of visual hierarchisation, the role of text and attribution, and the nature of the emotional and interpretative effect.

Thus, analysing museum exhibitions in Albania makes it possible to identify four stable models of visual storytelling: national-historical, spatial-memorial, documentary-testimonial, and photographic. Each model is built around a specific narrative formation principle: thematic integrity, correspondence between form and content, documentary reliability, or cultural contextualisation through visual series. Visual narrative in these exhibitions does not arise through an individual exhibit or design device, but through the coordination of object-based material, space, route, text, attribution and mode of perception. This confirms that museum exhibitions can act as an independent form of cultural interpretation in which visual, spatial, and documentary means transform material into a coherent message about memory, identity, and historical experience.

Discussion

The results showed that the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is formed by coordinating object-based material, the route, the space, text, graphics, light, colour, archival materials, and modes of visitor perception. This logic aligns with the findings of H. Rosli *et al.* (2022), who presented digital storytelling as a process combining content sequence, visual organisation, and user perception. However, the results obtained in this article extend this approach beyond the digital format. Museum storytelling arises not only through the digital presentation of information, but also through the physical route, object-based foundation, spatial composition, and interpretative context of the exhibition. An analysis of how technological elements are incorporated into the overall display structure clarified the connection between visual narrative and visitor experience. A.N. Hijazi & A.H.A. Baharin (2022) examined the influence of digital technologies on museum perception and audience engagement. In the analysed cases, visitor engagement depended not on the mere presence of a digital element, but on its connection with the exhibit, route, explanatory text and spatial logic of the room. Therefore, the technological component acquired narrative significance only when incorporated into the exhibition storytelling system. The results concerning the perceptual and emotional impact of the museum exhibition revealed the mechanisms of

immersion, which cannot be attributed solely to digital or audio means. In their review, A.G. Privitera *et al.* (2025) presented audio as a means of immersive storytelling in cultural heritage. This article traces a similar principle at the level of visual-spatial exhibitions, where the emotional effect is formed through the route, lighting, density of material arrangement, documentary testimonies, and the visitor's bodily experience of movement. In the case of Bunk'Art, this concept was given spatial form, as the bunker architecture itself established a way of perceiving the past. The structuring function of graphics, navigation and explanatory text in the article's results showed that the visual organisation of an exhibition is not limited to museum space design. This approach aligns with the study by O. Yezhova *et al.* (2025), which considered the design of online museums in relation to cultural heritage, art, science and digital representation. This approach was transferred to the physical exhibition in the present article, where graphics, captions, thematic blocks and navigational solutions were examined as means of organising a semantic route and linking individual objects to the general theme.

Analysis of multimedia elements revealed that digital tools cannot form the basis of a museum narrative independently of the object-based and spatial structure of an exhibition. This conclusion corroborates the findings of A. Tham *et al.* (2025), who presented technological and digital innovations as a driving force in the transformation of the museum landscape. In the analysed article, the transformation of the museum display is revealed not merely by the introduction of technologies, but by their function within the exhibition system. Video, sound, digital archives and interactive screens only acquired meaning when they supported the object-based material, the route and the interpretative task of the exhibition. The institutional logic of visual storytelling was evident in the fact that the narrative structure depended on the selection of material, the distribution of information, the organisation of the route, and the modes of communication with visitors. In their study, N.L. Tran & W. Rudolf (2024) examined high-tech museum applications in a managerial context. Their results supplement this line, showing that, to form a visual narrative, technological infrastructure and management of digital solutions are not the only significant factors; curatorial decisions also play a role in determining the semantic centres of the exhibition and the order in which they are included in the overall display. Cultural contextualisation was identified as one of the principles of visual narrative formation since the meaning of a museum object is derived from its connection to historical time, the social environment, visual series, attribution, and explanatory text. This approach is similar to the work of K. Kasemsarn & F. Nickpour (2025), who linked digital storytelling in cultural and heritage tourism with social media and youth engagement. In this article, a similar process took the form of an object-based exhibition

at the Marubi National Museum of Photography, where the photographic image was considered part of cultural memory through portrait series, authorship, dating, captioning, and visual code comparison. The results relating to the relationship between physical objects and digital layers demonstrated the necessity for semantic coordination between exhibits, routes, texts and the spatial logic of displays. This conclusion builds upon the work of A. Ramtohl & K.K. Khedo (2024), who considered augmented reality as a means of enhancing cultural heritage perception. Here, the digital supplement was not presented as a self-sufficient narrative source; its function depended on its ability to reveal the connection between the exhibit and its context, route, and museum interpretation.

The interactivity of the analysed exhibitions was revealed not only as a technological action, but also as a sequential reading of space, objects, documents, images, and textual connections. This complements the study by C. Silva *et al.* (2023), which considered augmented reality as a means of organising participatory cultural heritage activities. This article specifies visitor participation through the museum route, incorporating visitors into the narrative via a digital interface, movement, material comparison and the gradual disclosure of semantic connections. The educational effect of the visual narrative was found to be linked to the way in which the exhibition organised the perception of the cultural material. In their meta-analytical review, Y. Zhou *et al.* (2022) analysed virtual and augmented reality in the context of museum learning. The results obtained supplement this approach, showing that learning in museums is supported not only by technology, but also by the route's sequence, highlighting key objects, the relationship between images and text, visual hierarchy, and explanatory context. Therefore, visual narrative performs not only a representative function, but also interpretative and educational functions. The analysis of the role of multimedia and interactive elements confirmed the need to coordinate the digital layer with the object-based and spatial foundation of the exhibition. This aligns with the review by A. Chatsiopolou & P.D. Michailidis (2025), which examined augmented reality in cultural heritage through design, development, and user experience evaluation. Here, the focus shifted from the user interface to the technological exhibition function: augmented reality only strengthens visual narrative when it reveals the connection between the exhibit, the route, the historical context, and the interpretive display task. The architectural environment in the article's results was defined as an independent carrier of visual storytelling rather than a neutral container for exhibits. This position aligns with the work of M. Denni *et al.* (2026), in which spatial augmented reality was analysed in the context of cultural heritage. A similar logic was revealed in this article at the level of the physical museum environment: scale, enclosure, lighting, corridor structure, and bodily experience

of movement all established conditions for perceiving the past, and were incorporated into the narrative structure.

The results concerning physical and digital forms of museum representation showed that the basic principles of visual narrative remain significant regardless of display format. This logic intersects with the study by H. Cui & J. Wu (2025), in which virtual exhibitions were considered a form of museum representation. In this article, the transition to digital or virtual forms was not considered to cancel out the object-based foundation, the sequence of perception, the visual hierarchy or the interpretative context. The difference lies not in the logic of storytelling itself, but in the means of its implementation. Immersiveness was considered meaningful only in terms of content when connected with cultural material, rather than as an independent visual effect. This conclusion aligns with the bibliometric study by L. Jiang *et al.* (2025), which presented immersive technologies as a tool for heritage preservation and presentation. However, the results obtained introduce an exhibition-related limitation to this tendency: technological impact strengthens the museum message only when connected to the object, space, route, and cultural context. The visitor experience described in the article was linked to route coherence, the visual environment, text, objects, and emotional modes of perception. This position supplements the model of S.E. Lu *et al.* (2023), in which the development of the technological museum experience was considered in stages. In this article, technological experience is incorporated into a broader exhibition structure; it does not form a separate level of communication, but operates as part of the museum's storytelling when connected to the object-based and spatial organisation of the display. The accessibility of the museum message was considered in terms of not only physical or educational access, but also the clarity of the connection between objects, texts, routes and cultural meaning. This result intersects with the study by A.I. González-Herrera *et al.* (2023), in which museums and cultural spaces were examined in terms of education and accessibility. In this article, accessibility was clarified visually and narratively: an exhibition becomes interpretable when visitors can trace the role of objects within the overall narrative structure and their connection to the thematic block.

The technological elements of the obtained results were defined as part of the museum narrative, rather than as its foundation. This approach builds on the work of C. Avlonitou *et al.* (2025), who considered the museum environment through the concept of the smart museum and the use of advanced technologies. In this article, however, the notion of a 'smart' museum environment is not linked to saturation with digital tools, but to semantic coordination between technology, the collection, the space, and interpretation. Technological components only become productive for the narrative when they are included in the structure of the museum message. The pedagogical function of the visual

narrative was evident in the way the exhibition educates visitors through the route, highlighting key objects, connecting images and texts, comparing documents, and transforming visual material into a culturally meaningful message. This approach supplements the systematic review by T. Karakuş Yılmaz *et al.* (2024), which considered technologies in museum learning through their educational roles. This article links educational value not only with interactivity, but also with the perception structure established by exhibition design. The functionality of immersive solutions was examined in terms of their role in visual hierarchy, emotional impact, and connection to the interpretative context. This approach intersects with V. Komianos's (2022) review, in which extended reality in museums was analysed in terms of the functions provided and forms of interaction. The results obtained refine this approach, demonstrating that the narrative significance of a technological solution can vary depending on its position in the exhibition, its relationship to the route, and its ability to facilitate semantic connections between objects. The need to integrate immersive technologies into the overall structure of cultural representation was revealed by connecting the digital layer to the object, route, text, space, and cultural display tasks. This position builds on the work of C. Innocente *et al.* (2023), who proposed a framework for analysing the application of extended reality in cultural heritage studies. From a visual narrative perspective, however, such a framework requires clarification in terms of exhibitions: immersive technologies should not be considered as a separate category of museum renewal, but rather as a means of reinforcing the object-based, spatial and interpretative levels of an exhibition.

The comparison of the results with those of other studies showed that technological, digital and immersive solutions do not negate the fundamental importance of exhibits, routes, spaces, texts, graphics, lighting, archives and architectural environments. The distinction lies in shifting the emphasis from individual means of museum communication to the relationships between exhibition components. In this context, visual narrative acts as an integrative structure in which the object-based, spatial, textual, visual and technological levels combine to form a coherent museum message.

Conclusions

The study showed that the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is not determined by the individual expressiveness of the exhibits themselves, but by how they are incorporated into an object-based, spatial, textual

and interpretative display system. A museum exhibition was found to function as a form of cultural interpretation when the exhibits, route, architectural environment, lighting, colours, graphics, explanatory texts, archival materials, and visitor movement patterns form a coherent, interconnected structure. According to this understanding, visual narrative is not merely a decorative or supplementary element of exhibition design; rather, it is a mechanism that transforms museum material into a coherent message about memory, identity, historical experience, and cultural continuity.

The study determined that the visual narrative of a museum exhibition is formed through the interaction of several interconnected elements, including historical artefacts, the architectural environment, the route of movement, photographic images, documents, archival materials, multimedia tools, light, colour, graphics, navigation, attribution and explanatory text. The significance of these components was found to lie not only in the organisation of the exhibition space, but also in creating a specific model for interpreting historical and cultural experiences. Case analysis of Albanian museums revealed four models of visual storytelling: national-historical, spatial-memorial, documentary-testimonial, and photographic. Comparing these models revealed the following principles of visual narrative formation: thematic integrity, spatial sequence, visual hierarchy, cultural contextualisation, correspondence between form and content, emotional engagement, documentary reliability and interaction between object-based, textual and visual-spatial levels.

The limitation of the study is connected with the fact that the analysis was based on open-access museum materials and four typologically significant cases from Albania, without conducting field observation or studying visitor perception. Further research may be directed towards expanding the corpus of museum cases, comparing Albanian exhibitions with international practices, and studying how different groups of visitors perceive visual narratives in historical, memorial, documentary and photography museums.

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Візуальні розповіді в музейних експозиціях: принципи створення

■ **Анотація.** Метою даного дослідження було визначення принципів, що лежать в основі формування візуальних наративів у музейних експозиціях. Це було досягнуто за допомогою якісного порівняльного та інтерпретативного аналізу наукових, фахових та музейних матеріалів, що знаходяться у відкритому доступі. Емпіричний матеріал було зібрано у чотирьох музеях Албанії: Національному історичному музеї Албанії, «Бунк'Арт», «Будинку листя»/Музеї таємного спостереження та Національному музеї фотографії імені Марубі. Дослідження показало, що візуальні наративи формуються не завдяки індивідуальній виразності експонатів, а завдяки скоординованій взаємодії об'єктного матеріалу, простору, маршруту, світла, кольору, графіки, пояснювального тексту, атрибуції, архівних матеріалів та способів сприйняття відвідувачів. Були визначені основні компоненти візуальних наративів у виставках: експонати, маршрути, просторова композиція, освітлення та колірне оформлення, графічний дизайн, пояснювальні тексти, навігація, фотографії, архівні матеріали, мультимедіа, архітектурне середовище та інтерпретаційні контексти. На прикладі албанських музеїв було визначено чотири моделі візуального сторітелінгу: національно-історичну, просторово-меморіальну, документально-свідчену та фотографічну. Перша модель базувалася на хронології та історичних артефактах, а також на концепції культурної спадкоємності. Друга модель базувалася на архітектурному середовищі, маршруті та емоційному впливі закритих просторів. Третя модель ґрунтувалася на документах, об'єктах технічного спостереження, архівних матеріалах та пояснювальному контексті. Четверта модель базувалася на візуальних серіях, атрибуції зображень та відображенні соціальної пам'яті. Таким чином, було визначено принципи формування візуальної нарації: тематична цілісність, просторова послідовність, візуальна ієрархія, культурна контекстуалізація, відповідність форми та змісту, емоційне залучення, документальна достовірність та взаємодія між об'єктним, текстовим та візуально-просторовим рівнями експозиції. Практичне значення цих висновків полягає у потенційному застосуванні запропонованих моделей та принципів в аналізі, проектуванні та оцінці музейних виставок

■ **Ключові слова:** культурна пам'ять; маршрут виставки; візуальна ієрархія; музейне оповідання; інтерпретаційний контекст; архітектурне середовище; документальна достовірність



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Metaphorical structure of the interior space in modern Protestant churches in Ukraine

Abstract. The study aimed to explore the distinctive features of the symbolic and metaphorical design of the interior spaces of Protestant churches in Ukraine in their contemporary context. The research methodology combined art-historical analysis with a comparative study of six Protestant churches in Ukraine (the “Bethel” Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman, the “Golgotha” Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kramatorsk, the “Golgotha” House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Lviv, and the Reformed Church in the village of Derzen, Zakarpattia region), a structural-functional approach to assessing the organisation of interior space, and an analysis of restoration and reconstruction practices in historic buildings. Art-historical analysis has shown that the interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine is organised around a central worship area, where the pulpit or ambo serves as a key compositional element, ensuring the congregation’s visual and acoustic focus on the sermon; the lighting design emphasises the geometry of the interior, with light colours and natural materials combined with minimalist decor, which aids concentration on spiritual content, whilst the layout takes into account ritual and communication needs, demonstrating functionality, symbolism and aesthetics. A comparative analysis has shown that modern churches in Ukraine are characterised by an open-plan layout, the use of modern building materials and a combination of natural and artificial lighting, which encourages community participation and makes worship more interactive, whereas historic buildings combine classical architecture with minimalist decoration, demonstrating flexibility and acoustic adaptability, whilst traditional symbols are integrated with functional elements in accordance with denominational identity and architectural traditions. The results obtained can be used by architects, art historians and researchers of religious culture for the design and restoration of Protestant churches, as well as by educators and cultural managers for organising educational and social events, considering spatial symbolism and denominational specifics

Keywords: house of prayer; visual culture; sacred architecture; restoration practices; perception of sacred interiors

Introduction

The growing role of sacred architecture in shaping the spiritual, cultural and communicative environment of religious communities in Ukraine highlights the distinctive features of the interior layout of Protestant churches. In the Protestant tradition, the space of the church fulfils not only a functional role as a place of worship, but also serves as a vehicle for symbolic and meaningful significance, reflecting theological ideas, community

values and the nature of religious practice. Through the composition of the space, the positioning of the pulpit, the arrangement of seating for worshippers, and the use of light and acoustics, a unique metaphorical system is formed, which contributes to the creation of a special spiritual environment and influences the perception of the sacredness of the space. An examination of the metaphorical organisation of the interior space of Protestant

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churches in Ukraine can be used for further research of the principles governing the formation of their architectural environment, the symbolic language of space, and the specific nature of the interaction between architectural form and religious content.

An academic examination of metaphorical language within the religious and socio-cultural sphere provides a substantial theoretical foundation for studying the organisation of the interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine. In their study, M. Balaklytskyi & O. Polumysna (2025) analysed the results of an expert survey on the self-perception of Ukrainian Protestantism between 2018 and 2024. The authors examined the characteristics of the formation of the image of Protestant communities, described the key features of their identity, and traced changes in the perception of Protestantism within the Ukrainian religious milieu. A synthesis of theoretical approaches to organisational metaphor broadens the possibilities for interpreting spatial structures in various social systems. M.I. Beane & P.M. Leonardi (2022) explored the “tempo layering” metaphor as a model for organising activity in the context of technological change. The researchers analysed how metaphorical models help explain complex organisational processes and shape new approaches to interpretation the structure of social institutions. A deeper analysis of symbolic models of religious discourse contributes to research of metaphorical mechanisms in the religious sphere. O. Cherkhava *et al.* (2025) examined the reconstruction and interpretation of theolinguistic matrices in popular religious discourse across different languages. The researchers investigated the formation of stereotypical linguistic models and described their role in conveying religious meanings within the cultural sphere.

The historical context of the development of Protestant communities in Ukraine provides the basis for analysis of the distinctive features of their architectural and spiritual environment. H.W. Kim & J.K. Chung (2023) analysed the history of the emergence of Protestantism in Ukraine, traced the main stages of its development, and examined the influence of social and cultural factors on the formation of Protestant religious traditions. The linguistic and stylistic features of religious discourse shape the symbolic system of sacred space. T. Kots (2024) examined the religious style of the Ukrainian literary language within a pan-Slavic context. The traditions and challenges of the development of religious language have been analysed, and its functioning in the cultural and spiritual environment has been described. Theoretical reflection on organisational identity broadens approaches to interpreting the structure of religious institutions. K. Knorr & F. Hein-Pensel (2024) examined the development of the concept of organisational identity. The researchers analysed the dissemination of this theory in academic discourse and described its significance for determination of the internal structure and values of various organisations. L. Lozova (2025) analysed the so-

cio-ethical motifs in Ukrainian wartime icons. Symbolic images were examined, and how social and spiritual experiences are reflected in religious art were described. An analysis of the functioning of internal structures in various organisational systems contributes to research of the principles of spatial organisation. R. Lenz & F. Hoos (2023) investigated the future role of internal functional units within organisational structures. They analysed their support, development and advisory functions, outlining the transformation of internal organisational processes.

Metaphorical models form the interpretation of complex phenomena and influence the process of interpreting information. The search for new models of organisational structure in the humanities contributes to a rethinking of the interaction between space and social communities. T.G. Page & L.W. Capizzo (2024) proposed the concept of the tent model of organisation as a metaphor for an open structure of interaction. The researchers examined the principles of permeability, multi-level identity and the interaction of different groups within the organisational space.

Despite the aspects highlighted by the aforementioned authors, there remain gaps in research into the metaphorical organisation of the interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine regarding the relationship between architectural choices and the perception of sacredness by worshippers. There has been insufficient research into how spatial metaphors influence the formation of a religious community's identity and communication among worshippers. There is a lack of systematic comparative analysis of different churches and styles of spatial organisation, which would demonstrate the specific nature of the Ukrainian Protestant environment. The study aimed to highlight the specific metaphorical resonance of the interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine at the present stage of their existence. The research objectives were to conduct an art-historical analysis of the interior space of Protestant churches; to conduct a comparative analysis of the architecture and interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine; and to examine the practices of restoration and reconstruction of historic Protestant churches.

Materials and Methods

The type of research is theoretical, aimed at analysing and summarising academic approaches to research of the church. The methodological framework of the study was based on a comprehensive combination of several academic methods and stages. The first stage was an art-historical analysis based on academic sources from the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience (2022) and S. Scroope (2022). M. Kulik *et al.* (2022) were also considered, and these were used to study the compositional, stylistic, and symbolic characteristics of the interior space of churches. These sources were selected based on their scientific

relevance and comprehensive coverage of the architectural, functional and symbolic features of the interior space of modern churches in various cultural and confessional contexts. Within the framework of this method, the study examines the features of sacred architectural composition, the organisation of the lighting environment, the use of colour, materials, decorative elements and stage space, and acoustics, which shape the metaphorical perception of the sacred interior. In addition, the principles of Protestant theology are presented, in particular the ideas of simplicity, openness of space and the priority of preaching.

The second stage involved a comparative analysis of several Protestant churches in Ukraine. The comparative analysis included the “Bethel” Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman, the “Golgotha” Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kramatorsk, the “Golgotha” House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Evangelical Christians) “Golgotha” in Lviv, and the Reformed Church in the village of Derzen. These churches were selected for comparison as they represent various Protestant denominations (Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Adventists and Baptists) and reflect the specific architectural and interior features of both historic and contemporary buildings in various regions of Ukraine, which can be used for an analysis of the influence of liturgical traditions, socio-cultural context and functional requirements on the formation of the sacred environment. The sources included studies by J.H. Kilde (2008), C. Norberg-Schulz (1980) and J. Summerson (1993). In addition, studies by G. Marti (2012) & N. Mysak (2014) were analysed, as they provide an analytical and theoretical context regarding the architectural features, interior space and symbolism of Protestant buildings. These buildings were compared based on art-historical and architectural criteria, specifically the principles governing the organisation of the interior space, the compositional structure of the interior, the positioning of the pulpit or stage as the central element of worship, the use of light, colour schemes and materials, as well as the presence of symbolic or decorative elements. Additionally, the functional characteristics of the space, the interaction between the preacher and the congregation, the influence of Reformation ideas on the simplicity and openness of the interior, as well as the specific features of adapting modern churches and restoring historic buildings to the needs of the religious community, were considered. This approach made it possible to identify common principles underlying the metaphorical design of the interior spaces of Protestant churches and to determine the specific features of architectural and design solutions in different regions of Ukraine.

In the third stage, a structural-functional approach was employed, which can be used for an examination of the relationship between the architectural form of the

church and its liturgical functions. Within this approach, the adaptation of interior space to various forms of worship, musical accompaniment, collective prayer and educational activities were analysed. The elements of spatial transformation were also examined, in particular the use of mobile structures, multimedia screens, lighting and sound systems, which shape the contemporary metaphorical nature of the sacred environment.

In the fourth stage, an analysis of restoration and reconstruction practices was conducted based on academic sources, which was applied to the study of historic Protestant buildings. The criteria for including sources in the study of the reconstruction of Protestant churches were the presence of a detailed description of modern restoration methods, the practical application of conservation techniques and interior refurbishment, as well as evidence of the combination of historical authenticity with the functional and aesthetic adaptation of the space. Within this approach, the principles of preserving authentic architectural elements, adapting historic churches to contemporary liturgical needs, and combining traditional structures with new materials and technologies were examined.

Results

In Protestant churches, the layout of the interior is often centred around the central part of the space, where the pulpit is situated, reflecting the theological emphasis on preaching as the core element of worship. The space is organised to ensure that the congregation's gaze is directed towards the central part of the interior, where the main liturgical action occurs. The organisation of the lighting environment forms part of the architectural composition and shapes the atmosphere of the sacred interior. Natural light entering through large window openings or skylights creates a sense of openness and spatial depth. The light emphasises the geometry of the architectural forms, highlights the central elements of the interior and contributes to the creation of a balanced visual environment. In Protestant places of worship, lighting design is typically characterised by uniformity and the absence of complex decorative effects, in keeping with the principles of restraint and functional practicality of the architectural space (Scroope, 2022).

The colour scheme of the interior and the choice of materials shape the aesthetic character of the sacred space. The predominance of light or neutral shades creates an atmosphere of simplicity and contemplation. Many Protestant churches use natural materials, such as wood, stone or brick, which can be left exposed without elaborate decorative finishes. This use of materials emphasises the structural logic of the building and creates visual unity within the architectural environment. The colour and texture of the materials interact with the lighting and the form of the space, creating a harmonious artistic solution for the interior. The system of decorative elements in Protestant churches is characterised by

restraint and conciseness. The interior space does not usually contain a large number of iconographic images or complex decorative compositions. Symbolic accents may be represented by individual architectural elements, in particular a cross placed in the central part of the interior or above the pulpit (Hutsul, 2018). The geometric

organisation of space, the rhythm of structural elements, and the proportionality of architectural forms also acquire symbolic significance, forming an orderly and harmonious interior structure. Table 1 presents the characteristic features of the organisation of the interior space of modern Protestant churches in Ukraine.

Table 1. Characteristic features of the interior design of modern Protestant churches in Ukraine

Element of spatial organisation	Key features	Implementation example
Central feature of the interior	Space is organised around a central worship area	Placement of the lectern or pulpit in the centre or along the axis of the hall
Priority of preaching	Architectural features draw the congregation's attention to the pulpit	Department's central location, with the seating facing the stage
Open plan layout	Absence of complex partitions and the division into numerous zones	Spacious hall for community gatherings
Stage layout	Designated area for preaching, musical accompaniment and the choir	Raised platform or stage
Lighting	Predominance of natural or uniform artificial lighting	Large windows, overhead lighting
Colour scheme	Use of light and neutral colours	White, light beige, natural wood tones
Materials	Predominance of natural or simple building materials	Wood, stone, brick, and concrete
Decorative elements	Minimalism in interior design	Cross on the central wall, simple geometric shapes
Space for the community	Arrangements for communal worship	Rows of benches or chairs facing the centre
Acoustics	Space is designed for preaching and music	Open-plan hall with excellent acoustics

Source: compiled by the author based on M. Kulik *et al.* (2022)

The layout of the church's interior is determined by the interplay between architectural form and liturgical practice. The space for preaching, musical accompaniment or choral performance is arranged in such a way as to ensure clear visibility and acoustic interaction with the congregation. The pews or seating for worshippers are oriented towards the central part of the interior, creating a single spatial focal point. This interior layout helps to create a shared gathering space, in which the architecture and the worship service form a cohesive whole. The architectural organisation of the interior of Protestant churches is linked to the principles of Protestant theology, which are reflected in the spatial structure and artistic design elements. The ideas of simplicity, openness and functional clarity form the basis of the architectural concept of such buildings. The absence of excessive ornamentation, the use of clear geometric forms and the rational organisation of space help to focus attention on the sermon and communal worship (State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, 2022). As a result, the interior of the church emerges as an artistically organised environment in which architectural, lighting and symbolic elements interact with one another, forming a holistic perception of the sacred interior.

The "Bethel" Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi is a typical example of modern Pentecostal sa-

cred architecture, in which the principles of functional practicality and symbolic expressiveness are combined (Fig. 1). The building is a hall-type structure with a large capacity for mass worship and active community participation, and this determines its spatial and compositional organization. The architectural language of the church is formed by the synthesis of neo-historical motifs, post-modern trends and features of modern public architecture, which emphasises the openness and communicativeness of the sacred space. The interior is a multi-level, amphitheatre-style hall with a stage-and-pulpit in the centre, where the sacredness is placed in the sermon and shared experience of faith, rather than traditional religious imagery (Kilde, 2008).

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa is distinguished from other Protestant buildings by its striking historic structure, featuring a façade with neo-Gothic elements that combine understated ornamentation with a functional interior layout. The central positioning of the worship space, particularly the pulpit, defines the compositional focus of the hall, whilst the lighting scheme relies on natural light through large window openings (Fig. 2). The limited use of decorative symbols and the neutral colour scheme of the interior correspond to the Protestant aesthetic of modesty and an emphasis on the sermon and communal prayer (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).



Figure 1. The “Bethel” Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi

Note: a – facade, b – interior layout

Source: compiled by the author based on the Religious Information Service of Ukraine (2010)



Figure 2. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa

Note: a – facade, b – interior layout

Source: compiled by the author based on Otdyhaem (n.d.)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman is a prime example of modern Protestant sacred architecture in Ukraine from the late 20th to the early 21st century, combining the principles of functionality, architectural minimalism and theologically informed artistic restraint (Fig. 3). The building is designed in simple geometric forms without excessive ornamentation, reflecting the Adventist tradition's focus on inner spirituality and the priority of the Word of God over visual symbolism; the façades are accentuated by the rhythm of the windows and the restrained contrast of planes, whilst the absence of domes or striking vertical features emphasises a departure from the historical canons of church

architecture. The interior is organised on a hall-style principle, with the pulpit dominating as the centre of worship, a clear arrangement of seating for the congregation, and minimal decoration, which promotes acoustic and visual focus. Uniform natural and artificial lighting is substantial, embodying the symbolism of light as spiritual enlightenment, whilst the neutral colour scheme enhances the sense of space and tranquillity. In addition to its religious function, the building fulfils an educational and social role, including spaces for learning and community activities, thereby serving not only as a religious centre but also as an element of the city's cultural environment (Summerson, 1993).



Figure 3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman

Note: a) facade; b) interior layout

Source: compiled by the author based on Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Uman, Ukraine (n.d.)

The “Golgotha” Evangelical Baptist Church in Kramatorsk is a prime example of the adaptation of a secular building to the needs of a Protestant congregation, illustrating the process of sacralising a space without radically altering its architectural form: the exterior combines features of late Neoclassicism and Socialist Realism with vertical volumes, arched finishes and a cross installed as a sacred marker, whilst the interior is organised as a large hall with the pulpit and music stage facing the congregation,

ensuring the visual and acoustic unity of the community; the decorative ceiling system and chandeliers, drawing on secular traditions, become a neutral backdrop for spiritual contemplation, and the large-scale monumental painting of Golgotha serves as a visual sermon, emphasising the dominance of the biblical Word, which shapes the hierarchy of space and integrates architecture, image and text into a single semantic system characteristic of the Baptist denomination (Marti, 2012) (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. The “Golgotha” Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kramatorsk

Note: a – facade, b – interior layout

Source: compiled by the author

The “Golgotha” House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Lviv is a multifunctional Protestant complex that combines a prayer hall, seminary classrooms and social and educational spaces, creating a cohesive architectural ensemble in the style of a megachurch. The exterior is designed in a contemporary modernist style with vertically dynamic ribs and large glass surfaces, symbolising openness, spiritual growth and communication with the world. The interior is organised on an amphitheatre principle with no columns in the central space, which promotes the visual unity of the congregation and active participation in worship, whilst the unusual window openings provide abundant

natural light, symbolically linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. The presence of lecture halls, a library, computer rooms, a sports hall and a hall of residence for seminarians demonstrates the integration of the spiritual, educational and social dimensions of the Pentecostal worldview, whilst its location in the Sykhiv district of Lviv ensures the complex serves as a local spiritual and cultural centre (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Figure 5 illustrates the “Golgotha” House of Prayer for Christians of the Evangelical Faith in Lviv as a modern Protestant building with an open interior, designed for the functional conduct of worship services and the active participation of the congregation.



Figure 5. The “Golgotha” House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Lviv

Note: a – facade, b – interior layout

Source: compiled by the author based on N. Mysak (2014)

The village of Derzen (Transcarpathian region) is first mentioned in 11th-century sources, and from the 14th century onwards it is recorded as a relevant

parish centre; the Reformed community was established in the mid-16th century during the Reformation, thanks to the efforts of Martin Sant Kalmanchehi and

the support of the local nobility. The new stone church was built between 1810 and 1814 to a design by Matthias Fischeder as a single-nave structure with classical elements; the 38-metre-high bell tower was completed in 1823, giving the building a striking vertical presence. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the church underwent alterations; in particular, the interior was significantly altered in the 1930s (Reformed Church of Dercen, n.d.). The architectural design combines classical restraint with Protestant functionality; the single-nave plan is elongated along the longitudinal axis, typical of Reformed churches in Hungary and Transcarpathia in the early 19th century, whilst the dominant feature of the exterior is the bell tower with a spire, which forms a vertical accent in the village's silhouette and marks the

sacred space (Fig. 6). The interior is organised as a large hall-like space with an “auditorium” layout, the central axis directed towards the pulpit, emphasising the priority of the sermon; the construction of gallery balconies in 1930 increased the church's capacity to over 1,000 seats and created an enclosed acoustic space for church singing and organ music. The 1932 pipe organ, situated in the west gallery and restored in 1997, highlights the European tradition and the community's sacred and cultural identity, whilst the minimalist decorative finish, wooden pews, pulpit, gallery balustrades and carved panels featuring biblical texts and symbols of bread adhere to the Reformed principle of “iconographic restraint”, where the word and the sign take precedence over images (Dercen, n.d.).

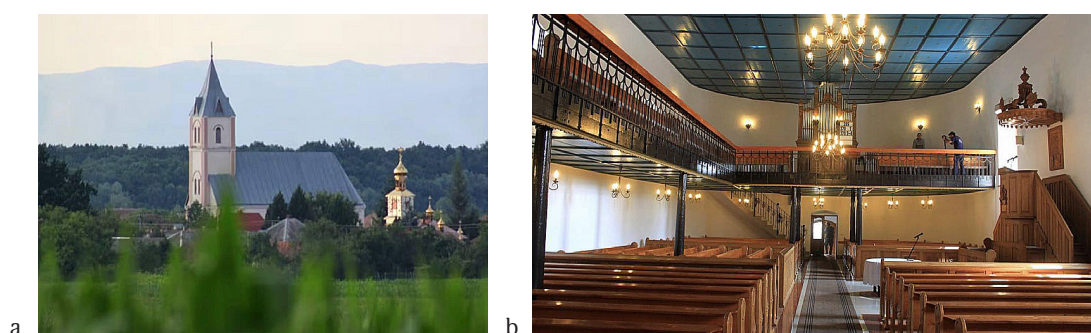


Figure 6. Reformed Church in the village of Derzen

Note: a – facade, b – interior layout

Source: compiled by the author based on Mukachevo (2020)

The featured churches are notable for their unique architectural features and symbolic imagery, which reflect the spiritual identity and values of their respective communities; their spatial layout, building forms and decorative elements create a symbolic embodiment of faith, communal worship and the historical traditions of Protestant denominations, transforming the buildings

into visual and spiritual markers of religious culture. Table 2 summarises the comparative characteristics of the interior spaces of various Protestant churches in Ukraine, demonstrating the features of layout, functional zoning and architectural elements that reflect denominational specificity and the organisation of worship services.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the interior spaces of Protestant churches in Ukraine

Church	Type of interior design	Location of the department/stage	Lighting	Colour scheme and materials	Symbolic and decorative elements	Functional features
“Bethel” Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi	Spacious room layout centred around a central axis	Central stage with the lectern	Large windows, a combination of natural and artificial lighting	Light colours, the use of wood and modern materials	Minimalist décor, with a cross as the central symbol	The space is designed for preaching, musical accompaniment and community gatherings
Reformed Presbyterian Church, Odesa	Clear, symmetrical composition	The chapel is in the central part of the city	Even lighting through the window openings	Neutral colour scheme, combining wood and light-coloured walls	Subtle symbolic elements	Space designed for preaching and communal prayer
Seventh-day Adventist Church, Uman	Open-plan layout	Stage with a lectern and a space for the choir	Mixed lighting	Light colours, modern finishing materials	Minimalist décor	Space is designed for preaching and musical worship

Table 2, Continued

Church	Type of interior design	Location of the department/ stage	Lighting	Colour scheme and materials	Symbolic and decorative elements	Functional features
Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, Kramatorsk	A spacious interior with a central feature	Central cathedral	Large windows and even artificial lighting	Neutral colour palette, wood and light-coloured materials	Minimalist symbols	Space is designed to facilitate interaction between the preacher and the congregation.
Reformed Church, Derzen	Historical composition with a traditional structure	The Cathedral is the focal point of the interior	Natural light coming through the windows of the historic building	Stone, wood, traditional materials	Subtle historical decorative elements	Blend of historic architecture and modern use
Protestant church, Lviv	Contemporary open-plan layout	Stage or lectern in the centre	A combination of natural and artificial lighting	Light colours, wood and modern materials	Minimalist decor	Space is designed for preaching, music and community gatherings

Source: compiled by the author

The interior layout of Protestant churches demonstrates a high degree of adaptability to various forms of worship, including traditional sermons, musical accompaniment and communal prayer. The layout of the halls commonly features an open central area with minimal barriers to visual and acoustic contact with the preacher, ensuring interactivity and active participation by the congregation. Seating is often arranged in semi-circular or sector configurations, emphasising the horizontal nature of the community and the accessibility of the space for every participant. The functional layout also covers the needs of musical accompaniment and educational activities (Rachman, 2023). The use of multimedia screens, sound systems and specialised lighting combines a spiritual atmosphere with modern technological capabilities, contributing to the formation of an emotional and ritual experience. Mobile structures, such as transformable benches or partitions, provide flexibility to the space,

which can be used to quickly adapt the hall's configuration to the specific needs of worship services, musical performances or educational programmes. Thanks to this approach, the interior space takes on a contemporary metaphor for the sacred environment, combining traditional symbols of faith with a functional organisation of space that supports communication, community and participation in religious life (Gnatiuk, 2025). The space becomes not only a place of worship but also an environment that shapes the cultural and spiritual experience of participants, reflecting individual and collective needs.

Modern theory on the restoration of Protestant churches is based on the principles of minimal intervention, preservation of authenticity and reversibility of restoration solutions, which involves the use of techniques that do not alter the building's original architectural structure and can be removed without damaging the historic features.

Table 3. Modern techniques for the restoration of Protestant religious buildings

Restoration techniques	Method description	Practical application in church buildings
Injection treatment of masonry	Filling cracks and voids in stone or brickwork using special lime or microcement mortars	Reinforcing the historic walls, stabilising the load-bearing structures and preventing further deterioration
Anchoring of structures	Installation of metal or composite rods in damaged sections of walls	Reinforcing the load-bearing capacity of historic walls and vaults without dismantling the original features
Bracing the masonry	Partial replacement of damaged bricks or stone using materials similar to the original ones	Restoration of the integrity of the walls and preserving the original appearance of the façades
Wood consolidation	Impregnation of wooden components with polymer resins or special strengthening solutions	Restoration of beams, floor joists, galleries and other wooden structures
Wood restoration	Replacement of damaged parts of wooden components with new inserts made from the same type of wood	Restoration of historic beams and floor joists whilst preserving as much of the original material as possible

Table 3, Continued

Restoration techniques	Method description	Practical application in church buildings
Micro-abrasive surface cleaning	Gentle cleaning of walls and decorative elements using a fine-grained abrasive	Removal of old layers of paint, dirt or deposits without damaging historic surfaces
Stratigraphic analysis of paints	Analysis of paint layers to determine the original colour scheme of the interior	Recreation of the historical colour scheme of the church's walls and ceiling
Modular furniture systems	Use of mobile benches, chairs or convertible structures	Flexible layout for worship services, concerts and community events
Acoustic panels	Installation of special sound-absorbing materials on walls or ceilings	Improved acoustics during sermons and musical performances
LED lighting systems	Use of energy-efficient LED systems with dimmable lighting	Creation of various lighting scenarios during worship services without interfering with the historic structures
3D laser scanning	Digital scanning of a building to create an accurate 3D model	Documenting the condition of the church prior to restoration and planning the repairs
Photogrammetry	Creation of accurate digital models of a site using photographs	Documentation of architectural details and decorative elements for future restoration

Note: LED – Light Emitting Diode

Source: compiled by the author based on G. Melika *et al.* (2025)

One of the key practices is the structural conservation of historic buildings, which involves techniques for reinforcing foundations, stabilising load-bearing walls and restoring brick or stone masonry. In such cases, injection techniques are used to fill cracks in walls with special lime or micro-cement mortars, which can reinforce the structure without dismantling the historic elements. To restore stone or brickwork, the anchoring method is often used, whereby metal or composite rods are embedded into damaged areas to reinforce the load-bearing capacity of the walls. Another popular technique is the repointing of masonry, where damaged sections are replaced with new elements made from materials that are as close as possible to the historical ones in terms of composition and texture. At the “Bethel” Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi, modern approaches to spatial organisation are employed, including modular furniture systems, acoustic panels and LED lighting systems, ensuring the interior's functionality and adaptability for various types of worship services. At the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa and the Reformed Church in the village of Derzen, the main focus is on preservation of historical authenticity, using injection conservation of masonry, structural anchoring, masonry reinforcement and stratigraphic analysis of paints to restore the original appearance. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman combines restoration work with modern technical solutions, including LED lighting, sound systems and partial structural reinforcement. At the “Golgotha” Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kramatorsk and the “Golgotha” House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Lviv, the focus is on modernisation and functional refurbishment, utilising acoustic panels, movable furniture and digital technologies such as 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry, which combine modern spatial requirements with the need to preserve the structural integrity of the buildings.

Another common practice is the restoration of historic timber structures, which are often found in Protestant churches in the form of ceilings, beams or galleries. To restore such elements, timber consolidation techniques are used, in particular impregnation with special polymer resins that strengthen the structure of the material. In cases of significant damage, the method of timber replacement is used, whereby damaged sections of beams are replaced with new inserts made from a similar type of wood, which are joined using traditional joinery techniques or concealed metal fixings. Antiseptic and fire-retardant coatings are also used to protect wooden structures, thereby extending the service life of historical elements. A popular area of restoration practice is the restoration of historical interiors of Protestant churches (Kiuntsli & Stepaniuk, 2023). In such cases, techniques are used to clean surfaces of later layers of paint or plaster, revealing the original decorative elements or texture of the materials. Mechanical cleaning methods are employed for this purpose, including micro-abrasive treatment, as well as chemical methods using special solutions for the gentle removal of old coatings. The interior restoration process also employs techniques for reconstructing historical colour schemes, whereby the original colour scheme of walls and ceilings is recreated based on stratigraphic analysis of the paint layers.

Modern practices in the renovation of Protestant churches also involve adapting the space to contemporary worship needs. To this end, interior transformation techniques are employed, in particular the use of movable furniture and modular structures, which can be used to alter the layout of the space depending on the type of service or community event. For example, traditional fixed pews can be replaced with lightweight, movable chairs or benches that can be easily rearranged to create different spatial configurations. This approach can

combine the church's historic architecture with the modern needs of the religious community.

One feature of present-day conservation practice is the integration of engineering and technology systems in historic religious buildings. For good acoustics in Protestant churches, acoustic panels are used that can be attached to walls or ceilings and covered with materials that correspond to the historical interior design. Often sound systems are also installed in a concealed manner, with speakers integrated into architectural elements or placed in special recesses. Lighting is provided by LED lighting systems of adjustable intensity that can be used to create different lighting scenarios for services without changing the historic character of the interior. Another part of the renovation is the use of modern materials to make historic buildings more energy efficient. During the restoration process, technologies of internal wall insulation with vapour-permeable materials can be used, without interfering with the natural ventilation of historic structures. Controlled ventilation and climate control systems are also used to preserve the microclimate and can be applied for the maintenance of stable levels of humidity and temperature inside the church (Denysenko *et al.*, 2025).

Modern restoration practices also employ digital technologies to study and document historic buildings. Laser scanning of the building is often carried out before restoration work begins, allowing an accurate three-dimensional model of the church to be created and the condition of its structures to be recorded. Photogrammetry is also used that allows the detailed documentation of decorative elements and architectural details for subsequent reproduction. It is recommended that the "Bethel" Evangelical Christian Church in Chernivtsi to apply flexible solutions for restoration and adaptation of the premises, namely modular furniture systems, acoustic panels and modern LED lighting solutions, which will allow the functional transformation of the interior without damaging its spiritual and architectural integrity and enable effective use of the premises for different kinds of services. It is recommended to propose restoration measures for the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa and the Reformed Church in the village of Derzen, aimed at preserving the historical authenticity, including injection conservation of masonry, anchoring of structural elements, crack repair, as well as stratigraphic analysis of paint layers for the most accurate possible restoration of the buildings' original appearance. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman is advised to pursue a combined approach, combining partial structural reinforcement with the modernisation of building services, in particular lighting and sound systems, which will improve the functionality of the space whilst maintaining the architectural features. It is advisable to recommend the use of modern functional refurbishment technologies, such as acoustic panels, movable furniture, laser 3D scanning and photogrammetry

for the "Golgotha" Evangelical Christian Baptist churches in Kramatorsk and the "Golgotha" House of Prayer of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Lviv, which will ensure accurate documentation of the condition of the buildings and facilitate the integration of digital tools into the restoration process without compromising the structural integrity of the buildings. Thus, modern practice of restoration and reconstruction of Protestant churches is a combination of different techniques of preservation of historical materials, methods of restoration of architectural structures and technologies of adaptation of the space to modern needs. The application of injection-based masonry conservation, timber restoration, micro-abrasive surface cleaning, modular furniture systems, acoustic panels, LED lighting and digital documentation technologies guarantees the preservation of the historical authenticity of sacred buildings, while creating a functional environment for the contemporary religious life of the community.

Discussion

The spatial design of church interiors fosters a sense of unity and engagement among worshippers. The findings are consistent with the conclusions of Y. Abumere (2025), who demonstrated that metaphors in the names of Pentecostal churches shape perceptions of sacred spaces and their social role. These metaphors help shape expectations regarding the functions of the space and its symbolic significance for the community. The organisation of space, combined with musical arrangements, enhances the emotional impact of worship services. Musical and spatial elements influence intergenerational interaction during worship. The interior space of churches contributes to the formation of collective identity and a sense of belonging. This is confirmed by T. Betts & A. Hinderaker (2025), who described the fragmented identity of worshippers in megachurches as a result of the interaction between space and ritual. The spatial organisation helps to integrate different groups of participants into a shared religious experience. Spatial design incorporates cultural influences and the local identity of the community. This conclusion corresponds with the findings of N. Cao (2022), who studied transnational evangelical networks and demonstrated their influence on the sacralisation of urban spaces. Space solutions appear to facilitate the reproduction of cultural models and symbols within the religious environment.

The internal space utilises metaphors for governance and communication within the community. These findings are consistent with those of R. Da'as *et al.* (2025), demonstrating that metaphors shape perceptions of an organisation's structure and functions during times of crisis. Spatial metaphors assist in adapting community practices to changing conditions and challenges. Spatial elements create conditions for ritual interaction and group organisation. This is consistent with M. Frye (2023), who described how rhetorical

patterns in biblical texts influence the organisational behaviour of groups. The study established that the organisation of space stimulates active participation in ritual and interaction among worshippers. Spatial metaphors shape the emotional and cognitive perceptions of worship participants, which aligns with S. Ghazinoory & P. Aghaei (2023), who described metaphor as a research method in the social sciences. Furthermore, spatial metaphors can be used for the identification of the structure of communication and interaction among worship service participants. These findings form multi-level models of community interaction and participation. A. Góral (2022) demonstrated that complex relational structures shape organisational strategies within cultural organisations. Such models contribute to the development of social cohesion and shared experiences among participants. These elements convey the community's religious and cultural narratives. This finding is consistent with N. Haynes (2022), who analysed Christian nationalism and biblical analogies as reflections of broader sociocultural processes. Spatial symbols ensure recognition of cultural identity and historical heritage by the community. These assertions partly coincide with the works of G. Gkantona (2022), which explore the significance of the inner dialogical nature of the individual through a multi-actor perspective, demonstrating the inner space as a multi-level system of interactions. In a church setting, various elements of the interior and spatial organisation create a dialogue between individual experience and collective identity.

A space organised as a community centre encourages interaction among participants and creates the conditions for a shared experience of faith. This argument aligns with the concept of "liminal space" developed by F. Putra *et al.* (2023), where strategic leadership within hierarchical structures utilises space to explore possibilities and shape a shared vision. In a church setting, this is manifested through a central space for worship, areas for socialising, and symbolic zoning that fosters a collective sense of belonging. The organisation of space as a community centre simultaneously fulfils the function of social integration and emotional engagement, which aligns with the approaches of B. Lusi *et al.* (2024), who investigated the use of metaphors to create support and comfort in challenging life situations. Similar to medical or social settings, the church space fosters emotional support and encourages visitors' engagement in the process of spiritual experience. Space, as an individual inner world, creates an atmosphere for self-reflection and an inner contemplation of faith. The results show that interior elements stimulate concentration and meditative interaction with spiritual symbols. This correlates with the views of M. Feist & S. Duffy (2023), noting individual differences in the perception of time and space, which shape the metaphorical interpretation of personal experience. Within the church environment, the zoning for individual prayer, the presence of

symbolic details and the spatial layout guide visitors towards inner contemplation. Parallels with the work of X. Yang (2023) have confirmed that the transformative experience in sacred space is based on symbolic and intercultural discourse, which can provide the spiritual changes within an inner world. Space as a tool for the transformation of believers manifests itself through a configuration that stimulates active participation and alters visitors' behavioural and cognitive patterns. This corresponds to the concept of C. Xie (2023), where space acts as a vehicle for transformational experience through symbolism and structured visual codes. Metaphorical elements, such as light, colour and the arrangement of spaces, shape the rhythm of interaction and set the direction for spiritual development. The findings are consistent with the research by M. Varanda (2024), which analyses ecological metaphors and their application in shaping shared values within contemporary religious practices. In the context of places of worship, this manifests through the organisation of space, which encourages visitors to actively reflect upon and participate in spiritual practices.

Spatial configurations combine elements of visibility and invisibility, thereby simultaneously maintaining control and the autonomy of participants. This is consistent with the study by Y. Zhu & Y. Chen (2023) describes the regulatory practices of Protestant churches in Wenzhou, where visibility creates a framework for interaction, whilst space provides freedom of individual choice. This organisation is reflected in the choice of prayer areas, the arrangement of furniture, and the integration of symbolic elements, which maintain both collective discipline and individual spiritual experience. Analysing space through the lens of metaphors demonstrates that it serves as a platform for the formation of shared narratives and personal development. The findings align with the study by I.G. Nordin (2023), where internal audit is viewed as a process of self-improvement and the development of autonomy. In a temple setting, space acts as an environment for the development of inner discipline, reflection and spiritual self-improvement, reinforced by the organisation of zones, symbolic accents and interactive elements. A bibliometric analysis of metaphors conducted by X. Zhao *et al.* (2023) shows a growing interest among researchers in conceptual metaphors across various fields. This confirms the relevance of considering the temple space as a metaphorical system where cognitive, emotional and social elements are combined. Simple interaction with spatial elements creates a complex experience that reflects hierarchies, rituals and personal interpretations. The space of Protestant churches functions as a complex metaphorical system that simultaneously integrates the collective and individual experiences of visitors. The organisation of space creates conditions for spiritual development, self-reflection and active interaction, reflecting the values and practices of the community.

Conclusions

Art-historical analysis has shown that the interior space of Protestant churches in Ukraine is organised around a central worship area, where the pulpit serves as a key compositional element. The space is organised to ensure the congregation's visual and acoustic focus on the sermon, whilst the lighting design emphasises the geometry of the interior and creates a sense of openness. The use of light colours and natural materials, as well as minimalist decor, promotes emphasis on the spiritual content of the service. The architectural organisation of the interior combines functionality, symbolism and aesthetic harmony, demonstrating the interconnection between Protestant theology and the artistic and spatial design of churches.

A comparative analysis of Protestant churches in Ukraine has revealed that each building reflects the specific character of its confessional identity, architectural traditions, and the functional requirements of the congregation. Modern churches, for instance "Vefil" in Chernivtsi, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uman and the House of Prayer in Lviv, feature an open-plan layout, are built of modern materials and have a combination of natural and artificial lighting, which encourages community participation and interactivity during worship. The "Golgotha" Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Kramatorsk is an architectural model, in which the simplicity of form and functional practicality are subjugated to the formation of a unified semantic system of the Baptist denomination. Historic buildings, such as the Reformed Church in the village of Derzen, combine classical architecture and minimalist decoration with the functional use of modern technologies. The interior space demonstrates flexibility, acoustic and visual adaptability, integrating spiritual symbols with the practical organisation of worship services. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Odesa is an example of the combination of neo-Gothic architectural expressiveness with a functional organisation of space, centred on the central role of the sermon.

Its restrained aesthetics, natural lighting and minimalism of decorative elements reflect the Protestant principles of modesty and spiritual focus.

Modern practices in the restoration and reconstruction of historic Protestant churches in Ukraine are based on the principles of minimal intervention, preservation of authenticity, and reversibility of restoration solutions. These include strengthening structures through injection conservation, anchoring and re-pointing masonry, restoring wooden elements through consolidation or prosthetics, as well as delicate cleaning and the recreation of the interior's original colour scheme. At the same time, methods are employed to adapt the space to the community's modern needs, including mobile and modular furniture, acoustic systems and LED lighting. The integration of digital technologies, such as 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry, ensures accurate documentation and planning of restoration works. The combination of these approaches can ensure the preservation of the historical authenticity of the churches, whilst creating a functional space for worship, musical and educational events that meet the contemporary needs of religious communities. The limitation of this study is the emphasis only on contemporary techniques for the restoration and reconstruction of Protestant churches in Ukraine, without comparing them to practices in other denominations or countries. Prospects for further research lie in studying the impact of integrating augmented reality digital technologies on the perception of historic Protestant churches by visitors and communities.

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Метафорика організації внутрішнього простору сучасних протестантських храмів України

■ **Анотація.** Мета дослідження полягала у розкритті особливостей символічного та метафоричного оформлення внутрішнього простору протестантських церков України в умовах сучасного функціонування. Методологія дослідження поєднувала мистецтвознавчий аналіз, порівняльне вивчення шести протестантських храмів України (церква християн віри євангельської «Вефіль» у Чернівцях, реформаторська пресвітеріанська церква в Одесі, церква Адвентистів сьомого дня в Умані, церква євангельських християн-баптистів «Голгофа» в Краматорську, дім молитви ХВЕ «Голгофа» у Львові та реформаторська церква в селі Дерцен, Закарпатська область), структурно-функціональний підхід до оцінки організації внутрішнього простору та аналіз реставраційних і реконструкційних практик історичних споруд. Мистецтвознавчий аналіз показав, що внутрішній простір протестантських храмів України формується навколо центральної зони богослужіння, де кафедра або амвон виступають ключовим елементом композиції, забезпечуючи візуальну та акустичну спрямованість громади на проповідь; світлове рішення підкреслює геометрію інтер'єру, світлі кольори та природні матеріали поєднуються з мінімалістичним декором, що сприяє концентрації на духовному змісті, а планування враховує ритуальні та комунікаційні потреби, демонструючи функціональність, символіку та естетику. Порівняльний аналіз показав, що сучасні храми України відзначаються відкритою зальною структурою, використанням сучасних будівельних матеріалів та поєднанням природного і штучного освітлення, що забезпечує участь громади та інтерактивність богослужіння, тоді як історичні споруди поєднують класицистичну архітектуру з мінімалістичним оздобленням, демонструючи гнучкість і акустичну адаптивність, а традиційні символи інтегруються з функціональними елементами відповідно до конфесійної ідентичності та архітектурних традицій. Отримані результати можуть бути використані архітекторами, мистецтвознавцями та дослідниками релігійної культури для проектування та реставрації протестантських храмів, а також педагогами і культурними менеджерами для організації освітніх і соціальних заходів із урахуванням просторової символіки та конфесійної специфіки

■ **Ключові слова:** дім молитви; візуальна культура; сакральна архітектура; практики реставрації; сприйняття сакрального інтер'єру

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