

Zrinka Mileusnić

University of Primorska,
Faculty of Humanities, Slovenia
zrinka.mileusnic@fhs.upr.si

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Introduction

The International Summer School of Museology and Heritage is a place for students, researchers, and professionals to come together to learn more about, protect, and explain the many types of heritage that exist in the world today.

Every year, the school chooses a theme that is relevant to current problems and challenges in the fields of heritage studies and museology. The 2025 edition, titled 'Research and Practices in a Rapidly Changing World,' prompts us to consider how museums and heritage sites can adapt to the rapid changes occurring in our world today. The main point of this year's theme is that research is not just an isolated academic exercise; it is the foundation of museums and heritage studies. We cannot protect heritage, develop new ways of engaging people, or ensure the long-term survival of cultural resources without research.

Research provides the knowledge base that supports curatorial decisions, conservation strategies, educational programmes, and public policies. It helps us move from words and ideas to evidence-based practices that meet the needs of both people and ecosystems. Research becomes ever more important in a world characterised by rapid change. Climate change puts the physical survival of monuments, archaeological sites, and museum collections in danger. Economic instability makes it harder for institutions to carry out their missions. Social changes – such as demographic shifts, migration, urbanisation, and digitalisation – transform how people relate to heritage. Political changes, which can happen suddenly and without warning, affect both the freedom of cultural expression and the funding that museums and heritage projects receive.

New technologies also open up opportunities for documentation, interpretation, and communication, but they bring risks too – from digital obsolescence to the loss of authenticity in the age of AI. Museums and heritage organisations are therefore at the intersection of multiple forces. In addition to addressing urgent concerns about relevance, inclusivity, and resilience, they remain responsible for preserving memory and material culture. Continuous learning and knowledge exchange across disciplines and generations are crucial in this setting. This idea is embodied by the Summer School, which provides an environment where experts and students can share knowledge, gain insights, and develop the skills necessary to adjust to the complexity of our times.

Museology and heritage studies have undergone considerable evolution in recent decades. Once thought to be specialised or even marginal areas, they are now seen as essential for understanding identity, cultural diversity, and sustainable development. Research is the foundation of this recognition. It helps us piece together histories that would otherwise be lost, make sense of physical evidence, and explore the intangible factors that shape communities.

Research supports acquisition, documentation, conservation, and interpretation in museums. In heritage studies, it underpins methodologies for preserving both tangible and intangible heritage. Without rigorous research, decisions about conservation and display risk becoming arbitrary and detached from context.

The significance of research is also evident in its ability to link heritage to broader societal issues. Conservation science shows how environmental change affects museum objects. Social sciences reveal how communities deal with heritage during crises. Historical research situates the political use of heritage, while digital humanities create new possibilities for accessibility and engagement. Research is not conducted in isolation: it informs practice, and practice generates new questions for research. This dynamic relationship is at the heart of modern museology and heritage work. It ensures that institutions are not only repositories of the past but also laboratories for ideas about the future.

The phrase 'rapidly changing world' describes the accelerating pace of the twenty-

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first century. These changes are not abstract – they manifest in dramatic ways. The conservation of cultural heritage is directly affected by rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events. Erosion, flooding, or desertification damage archaeological sites; humidity, mould, and biological infestations threaten collections. As ecosystems change, intangible heritage – such as traditional farming methods, rituals, or crafts – is also endangered. Museums must find ways to operate sustainably, reduce energy use, and embrace environmentally responsible practices.

Economic crises simultaneously affect government subsidies, private donations, and tourism revenues. This can result in staff shortages, delayed projects, or even institutional closures. At the same time, institutions are expected to demonstrate economic value through cultural tourism, urban regeneration, or creative industries. Balancing financial stability with preservation and education is always a challenge.

Demographic shifts, migration, and cultural diversity are transforming museum audiences. Institutions are now expected to represent multiple perspectives, work with marginalised groups, and foster social cohesion. Digitalisation further reshapes interaction with heritage. Online exhibitions, virtual reality, and participatory platforms broaden access, but they require new skills and resources. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of digital heritage, highlighting the need for adaptable approaches. Politics has always influenced heritage. Today, institutions face pressures from identity politics, contested histories, and geopolitical tensions. Heritage sites may become targets in armed conflicts, symbols in nation-building projects, or flashpoints in debates about colonial legacies and restitution. Museums and heritage professionals must work responsibly, transparently, and ethically in these contexts.

The digital revolution permeates every part of heritage work – from 3D scanning of monuments to big-data analysis of visitor behaviour. AI facilitates sorting and interpretation but also raises questions about authenticity, intellectual property, and human agency. Technology is not neutral; it reflects values and priorities. Heritage institutions must therefore critically evaluate tools, ensuring they serve humanistic and societal goals rather than purely commercial purposes.

In this ever-changing world, one thing remains constant: the need for ongoing education. Knowledge from ten years ago may no longer be adequate. Professionals must continuously acquire new skills, informed by scientific discoveries, theoretical frameworks, and technological innovation. For students, this means preparing for careers that demand adaptability and lifelong learning. For experienced professionals, it requires openness to continuing education and interdisciplinary collaboration. For institutions, it means fostering learning environments not only for staff but also for visitors and communities.

The Summer School addresses this need with a comprehensive programme of lectures, workshops, and peer learning. It emphasises that education is not simply the transmission of information but dialogue and co-creation. By bringing together participants from diverse cultural, academic, and professional backgrounds, the School demonstrates that learning is most effective when collaborative and inclusive.

Confronting the challenges of a rapidly changing world is difficult, but it also opens opportunities for heritage to shape the future positively. Research and practice in museology and heritage studies not only preserve the past but also strengthen communities facing uncertainty. Heritage gives people identity and belonging, provides tools for sustainable development (such as traditional ecological knowledge and adaptive reuse of historic buildings), creates spaces for dialogue on contested histories, and fosters creativity and intercultural understanding.

These contributions, however, require conscious ethical commitment. Museums and heritage professionals must respect community rights, acknowledge conflicting narratives, and ensure accessibility. They must also remain open to questioning their own assumptions and adapting to new contexts.

The title of the 2025 International Summer School of Museology and Heritage – Research and Practices in a Rapidly Changing World – describes our current condition and calls for action. Change is not something that merely happens to us; it is something to which we can respond with creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Research enables wise decisions, practice translates knowledge into action, and education prepares the next generation to continue the work. Together, they form a cycle that sustains museums and heritage through uncertainty. As we begin this year's programme, we invite participants to reflect on their role in this cycle. What types of research are needed to enhance our understanding of heritage in evolving contexts? How can museums become more resilient, inclusive, and impactful? How can education foster not only professional competence but also civic responsibility and global solidarity? The answers will not be found in a single lecture or workshop but in the collective experiences of the Summer School – in conversations, debates, and explorations that cross cultural, generational, and disciplinary boundaries. In this way, the Summer School is not just an academic event but a microcosm of the world we aspire to create: one where heritage is a source of knowledge, connection, and hope in a rapidly changing world.

