

# The Future of the Mont des Arts

Final Report  
June 2025

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# About Us

## Arthur M. Cohen Advisors

For over three decades, we have partnered exclusively with mission-driven organizations across the cultural and creative sectors. Our current work focuses on thought leadership and strategic visioning for new and transforming cultural spaces, organizations, and experiences.

We believe that arts and culture organizations have a major role to play in building community connections, and that their future relevance depends on understanding the changing needs of audiences today.

LOUISIANA MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

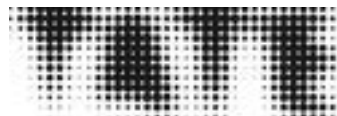
**CARNEGIE**  
MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

**ROM**

**MoMA**

**HIGH  
LINE** 

**GUGGENHEIM**



**THE  
MET**

# Process





## Overview

The Quartier des Arts has partnered with AMCA to explore dynamic ways to activate the Mont des Arts and drive positive civic and cultural impact for the area and for Brussels as a whole. The project focuses on the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Royal Library of Belgium, and the State Archives while engaging the entire area.

Specific objectives include:

Identifying **relevant field-leading museological and urban revitalization practices** for improved activation.

Exploring opportunities for **innovation and evolution of key components of RMFAB, RLB, and the State Archives.**

Cultivating **stronger relationships between area institutions.**

Creating momentum around a **galvanizing preliminary vision of the Mont des Arts' future** to attract funding and support.



# Situation Audit

We began the project by developing a working understanding of existing dynamics on the Mont des Arts through a Situation Audit, including:

**Foundational Research:** Building a broad understanding of the role the Mont des Arts plays in Brussel’s cultural life.

**Materials Review:** Analyzing relevant client-provided documents to surface initial opportunities and challenges.

**Social Listening:** Monitoring social channels to better understand public sentiment about the Mont des Arts.

**Questionnaire:** Identifying stakeholder wants and needs for the Mont des Arts.

Situation Audit	Understand existing dynamics
Trend Analysis	Identify trends relevant to activating the area
Benchmarking	Gather examples from the field
Site Visit	Assess visitor experience in person
Work Sessions	Present work & build consensus

## Trend Analysis, Benchmarking, and Site Visit

This audit surfaced existing strengths of the Mont des Arts and its member institutions, as well as opportunities for future growth.

Leveraging this working understanding, we conducted Trend Analysis and Benchmarking to highlight relevant best practices from the field.

In early June, we explored the Mont des Arts and visited several of the surrounding cultural institutions to validate and refine our work to date, observing how people interact with the space and discovering first-hand the vast potential of the Mont des Arts to propel Brussels forward.

### Situation Audit

Understand existing dynamics

#### Trend Analysis

Identify trends relevant to activating the area

#### Benchmarking

Gather examples from the field

#### Site Visit

Assess visitor experience in person

### Work Sessions

Present work & build consensus



## Work Sessions

Following our Site Visit, we presented our findings and facilitated discussion around the evolution of the Mont des Arts across two Work Sessions.

In the first session, we tested our initial hypotheses, presented relevant trends and best practices, and gathered stakeholder perspectives on how best to revitalize the area.

In the second session, we focused on building momentum around the Mont des Arts' key Opportunity Areas with policymakers and the core project team.

### Situation Audit

Understand existing dynamics

### Trend Analysis

Identify trends relevant to activating the area

### Benchmarking

Gather examples from the field

### Site Visit

Assess visitor experience in person

### Work Session

Present work & discuss recommendations

# Approach

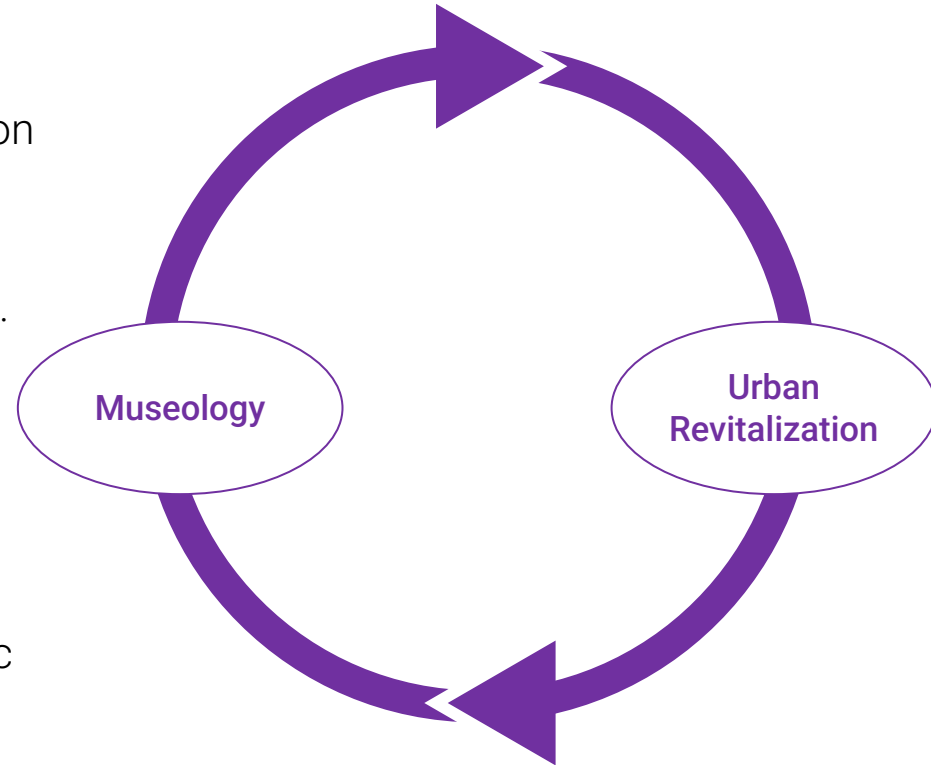


## Dual Lens: Museology x Urban Revitalization

Approaching the project through the dual lens of museology and urban revitalization targets a vision for the Mont des Arts animated by the mutual benefits that arise when dynamic cultural institutions anchor vibrant multi-use urban space.

**Museology:** an forward-looking field that reimagines museums as platforms for dialogue, participation, and public engagement

**Urban Revitalization:** the strategic renewal of urban areas through spatial, social, and economic interventions



## Dual Lens: Shared Values

### **Dynamism**

Flexible, activated,  
experimental, and  
responsive to cultural  
shifts

### **Human- Centricity**

Welcoming, accessible,  
experience-driven, and  
rooted in diverse  
audience needs

### **Authenticity**

Local-first, culturally  
grounded, shaped by  
“ownable” strengths

## From Inspiration to Vision

Identifying **best practices across museology and urban revitalization inspires us** to challenge assumptions, expand ambition, and define what's possible for the Mont des Arts.

But rather than treating these practices as isolated improvements, we must consider **how they can work together within a cohesive vision that's authentic** to both the Mont des Arts and Brussels as a whole.





# Opportunity



## Overview

With extraordinary potential and growing momentum, the revitalization of the Mont des Arts promises impact that expands far past its borders.

**Extraordinary Potential:** High-opportunity space and a vibrant cluster of institutions ready to help activate cultural heritage in Belgium for the 21st century

**Growing Momentum:** Visionary leadership and aligned institutions, set against a strong cultural ecosystem and an evolving tourism landscape

**Expansive Impact:** Unique positioning to play a key role in Brussels' ongoing transformation and drive benefits for all key stakeholder groups



## Brussels: A Future Cultural Capital

Over the past decades, **a thriving cultural ecosystem has emerged in Brussels**, with locals enjoying new venues and public spaces, a growing creative economy, and multicultural communities fueling artistic innovation.

In addition to enhancing quality of life for residents, these developments have increased the city's appeal to visitors. **But Brussels remains under-recognized on the European cultural stage.**

With strong institutions, rich heritage, and deep potential, the Mont des Arts can play **a key role in Brussels' vibrant cultural ecosystem and support the city's continued evolution into a cultural capital.**



## A Thriving Cultural Ecosystem

Across Brussels, a diverse and dynamic cultural ecosystem has taken root, reflecting a modern and multicultural city.



Art & Heritage



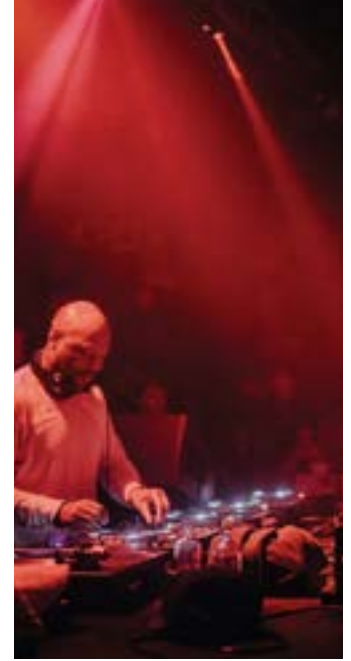
Gastronomy



Design



Architecture



Nightlife



## A Strong Local Audience Base

**Brussels locals already show a strong appetite for culture—and an overwhelming majority are eager to participate in future opportunities.**

**34%**

of Brussels residents  
take part in cultural  
activities in Brussels at  
least once a month.

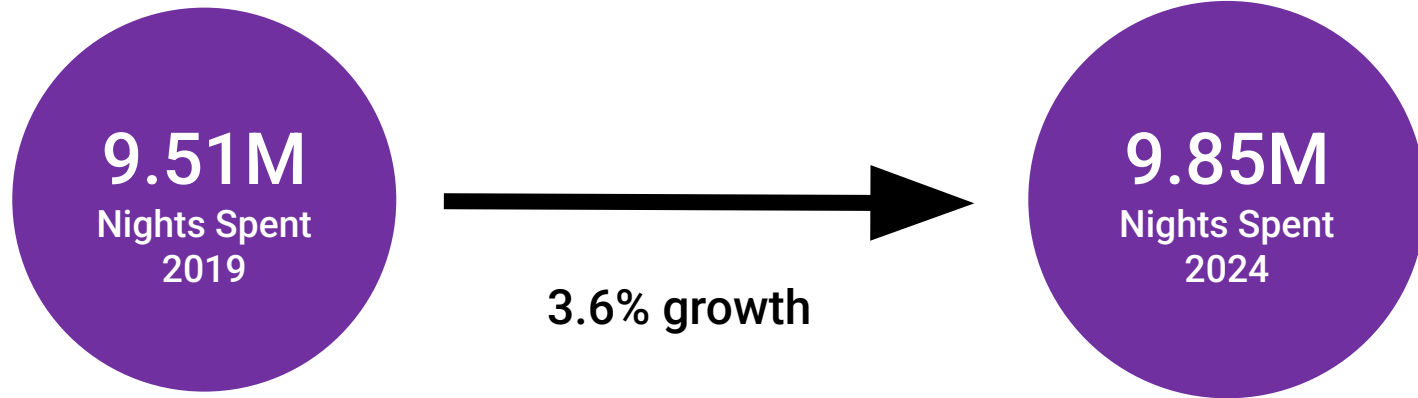
**80%**

of Brussels residents  
would like to take part in  
cultural activities in  
Brussels in the future.



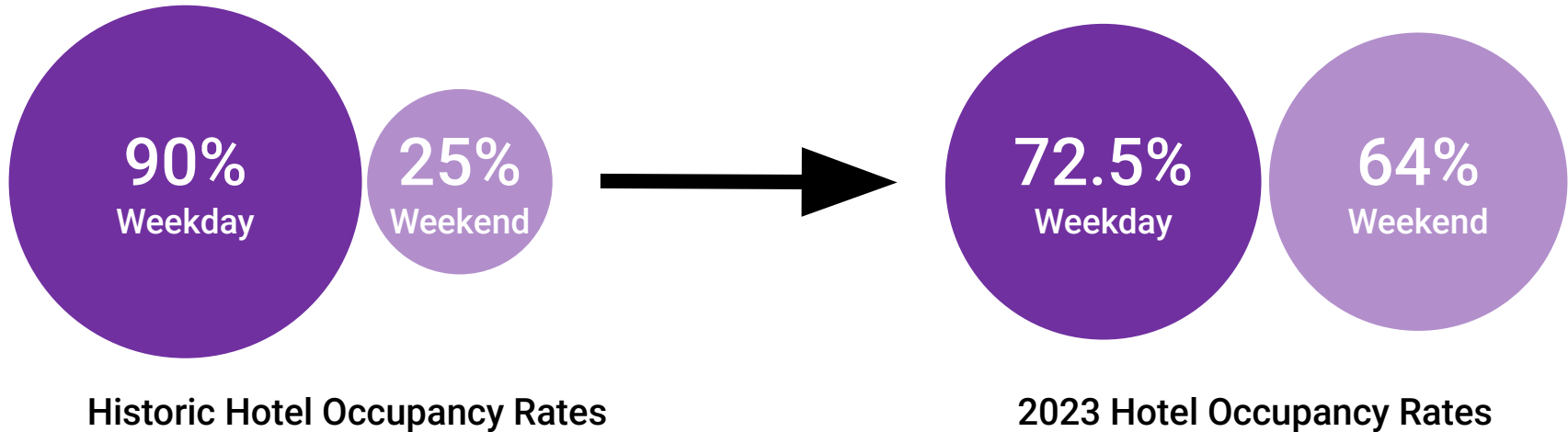
## Brussels Tourism Continues to Grow

Brussels has now surpassed the record tourism numbers it saw pre-pandemic.



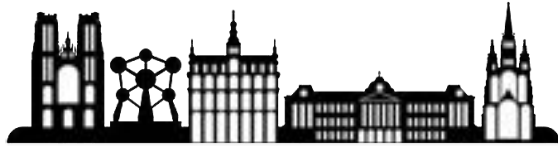
## Leisure Visits Catching Up to Business

**While historically most tourists have visited Brussels on business, increasingly visitors are drawn by Brussels' cultural offerings.**



## Brussels Still Trails Cultural Capitals and Peers in Visitation

Despite positive momentum, Brussels remains behind major European cultural capitals, as well as comparably sized peers.



Brussels: 7.4M nights spent in 2023



Stockholm: 12.5M nights spent in 2023



Amsterdam: 21.4M nights spent in 2023

## European Cultural Capitals: 2023 Nights Spent (millions)



## European Cultural Capitals: 2023 Tourist Density\*

Amsterdam	8.92	Berlin	5.35
Florence	8.90	Stockholm	5.21
Rome	8.65	Barcelona	4.88
Paris	6.10	Krakow	3.83
Prague	6.04	Madrid	3.67
Copenhagen	5.88	Budapest	3.33
Vienna	5.52	Brussels	2.18



## Comparables: 2023 Nights Spent (millions)



## Comparables: 2023 Tourist Density\*

Amsterdam	8.92	Cologne	3.25
Copenhagen	5.88	Helsinki	2.44
Vienna	5.52	Brussels	2.18
Stockholm	5.21	Basel	2.16
Oslo	4.00		

## Local Value, Global Appeal

**An activated Mont des Arts can further enhance Brussels' local cultural ecosystem while supporting its evolution into a dynamic cultural destination.**

**Old Meets New:** Fuse heritage and local creative energy, rooting innovation in history and global ambitions in community spirit.

**A Cultural Crossroads:** Further integrate culture into daily life by activating a cluster of world-class institutions and adjacent green spaces in the city center.

**Multidisciplinary:** Leverage a diversity of art forms, focus areas, and formats in collaborations that spark new perspectives and reach wider audiences.



## Future Vision: Ten Years On From Revitalization...

Brussels has cemented its position as the center of Europe and emerged as **a 21st-century cultural capital** — with the Mont des Arts a key player in its cultural ecosystem.

National and international tourists flock to the Mont des Arts as **a must-see cultural destination** offering dynamic, unexpected experiences beyond traditional heritage tourism.

Member institutions enjoy **higher visibility, more diverse audiences, and greater collaboration**, catalyzing further innovation.

Revitalization has fostered a **more welcoming, accessible, relevant, and participatory** approach to cultural heritage across the Mont des Arts.

Locals have reclaimed the Mont des Arts as **central to Brussels' urban fabric**, drawn by welcoming public space, a lively cultural scene, and a thriving creative community.

The Mont des Arts now stands as **a model of culture-led urban revitalization**, inspiring cultural leaders and policymakers around the world.

## Key Takeaways

### **Brussels is a re-emerging cultural capital.**

With a vibrant local cultural ecosystem and growing leisure tourism, Brussels is reasserting its role as a European cultural capital.

### **The Mont des Arts will play a key role in this growth.**

As a cultural crossroads where old meets new and disciplines mingle, a revitalized Mont des Arts can enrich Brussels' local ecosystem while amplifying its global appeal.

### **Revitalization will have far-reaching impact.**

Beyond benefits to member institutions, a revitalized Mont des Arts will provide benefits for Belgian citizens and visitors alike.



# Current State



## Overview

Identifying trends and best practices to inspire the Mont des Arts' revitalization first requires a solid understanding of the current state of the area and its member institutions.

Through conversations with project leaders, a material review, a stakeholder questionnaire, and social listening, we have identified current strengths and future opportunities for:

- **Mont des Arts**
- **Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium**
- **Royal Library of Belgium**



# Mont des Arts





## Overall Impression

The Mont des Arts boasts rich cultural assets and a deeply rooted heritage identity. But it struggles with with low dwell time, fragmented visitor experience, limited collaboration, poor navigability, and underutilized space.

**Future Vision:** Revitalize the Mont des Arts by enhancing cohesion, activating space, and cultivating local character to reinforce its cultural authenticity. Prioritize human-scaled design, community, and a unified vision to unlock the area's full cultural and civic potential.



## Identity & Character: Strengths

**Density:** A cultural hub where nationally significant institutions converge to celebrate heritage and culture

**Monumentality:** A dramatic urban landscape defined by grand architecture, historic buildings, lush gardens, and sweeping city views across a steep gradient

**Momentum:** Improved safety and active beautification efforts, complemented by institutional innovation and growing collaboration toward shared site revitalization



## Identity & Character: Stakeholder Insight

“Mont des Arts functions as a symbolic and cultural gateway to Brussels. It bridges the city’s political heart with its historical centre, physically and symbolically linking national identity, European presence, and urban life. It showcases Belgium’s artistic and civic heritage, making it a landmark of cultural diplomacy and public storytelling.”

- Stakeholder

## Identity & Character: Opportunities

**Embrace Localism:** Cultivate an authentic local character to engage residents and attract curious visitors alike.

**Democratize Culture:** Modernize the Mont des Arts to soften its elite and imposing atmosphere and create a more open, inclusive, and welcoming cultural environment, all while preserving the drama and heritage of its monumentality.

**Build a Cohesive Identity:** Embrace deeper collaboration to build a strong brand for the Mont des Arts that aligns with an integrated and seamless experience.





## Identity & Character: Stakeholder Insight

“The future of the Quartier des Arts depends not only on improving physical space or cultural programming, but also on reimagining how the district relates to the city and its people. It should become more than a postcard-perfect viewpoint or an enclave of formal culture. It should feel open, lived-in, and relevant to a broad cross-section of Brussels residents — including young people, families, artists, and those who don’t regularly visit museums.”

- Stakeholder

## Space: Strengths

**Centrality & Adjacency:** Situated at the city's middle with direct links to green spaces, transit, and other major tourist destinations

**Panoramic Topography:** Stepped gradient offering dramatic sightlines and iconic sunset views across Brussels, encouraging moments of pause and reflection

**Architectural Anchors:** Framed by monumental buildings that lend visual coherence, cultural weight, and a recognizable identity to the public realm



## Space: Stakeholder Insight

“The overall experience of the outdoor public space in the Quartier des Arts is both impressive and limited — a place of contrast. On the one hand, the area offers striking architecture, scenic views, and iconic landmarks like the Mont des Arts garden. The elevated location gives a sense of grandeur and historic significance. The central axis and symmetry of the space make it feel monumental...”

- Stakeholder

## Space: Opportunities

**Strengthen Connectivity:** Improve wayfinding and pedestrian flow to unify fragmented levels and encourage intuitive, continuous movement through and across the site.

**Enhance Accessibility:** Address steep gradient with inclusive design strategies to welcome broader mobility needs and increase dwell time.

**Activate the Underutilized:** Transform interstitial and underused spaces through public programming, seating, upkeep, lighting, and reclamation to foster safety and community.





## Space: Stakeholder Insight

“...On the other hand, the public space can feel somewhat formal, static, and uninviting for everyday use. There are few places that encourage people to relax, linger, or interact. Much of the space is designed for passing through rather than staying, and the lack of shaded areas, informal seating, or playful elements limits its appeal. In short, while the outdoor public space is visually powerful and symbolically important, it lacks the human-scale warmth and flexibility needed to function as a truly lively and inclusive urban space.”

- Stakeholder

## Institutional Ecosystem & Governance: Strengths

**Institutional Alignment:** Increasingly aligned institutions willing to work together toward shared goals for cultural and spatial revitalization

**Political Visibility:** District benefitting from growing attention by policymakers, creating momentum for integrated planning and sustained investment

**Visionary Leadership:** Evidence of forward-thinking strategies within key institutions signaling readiness for innovation and long-term cultural relevance





## Institutional Ecosystem & Governance: Stakeholder Insight

“Cultural institutions in the Quartier des Arts already collaborate on a fairly regular basis, but there is definitely room to strengthen these partnerships.”

- Stakeholder

“Strong collaborations between KBR, Museums and Archives are a reality on several themes and activities. There has been a positive evolution of this collaboration for a number of years”

- Stakeholder

## Institutional Ecosystem & Governance: Opportunities

**Streamline for Impact:** Demonstrate how unified governance can drive urban revitalization and provide value for locals and visitors alike.

**Deepen Institutional Synergies:** Foster more frequent collaboration, co-programming, and resource-sharing to maximize impact across cultural and civic institutions.

**Unlock Investment:** Pursue innovative and shared funding models to support cross-institutional initiatives and long-term district revitalization.



## Institutional Ecosystem & Governance: Stakeholder Insight

“The long-term future of the Quartier des Arts will require stable governance, investment, and political will — to coordinate institutions, manage shared spaces, and maintain quality over time. That will only be possible with clear leadership and meaningful engagement with the people who use the space daily.”

- Stakeholder



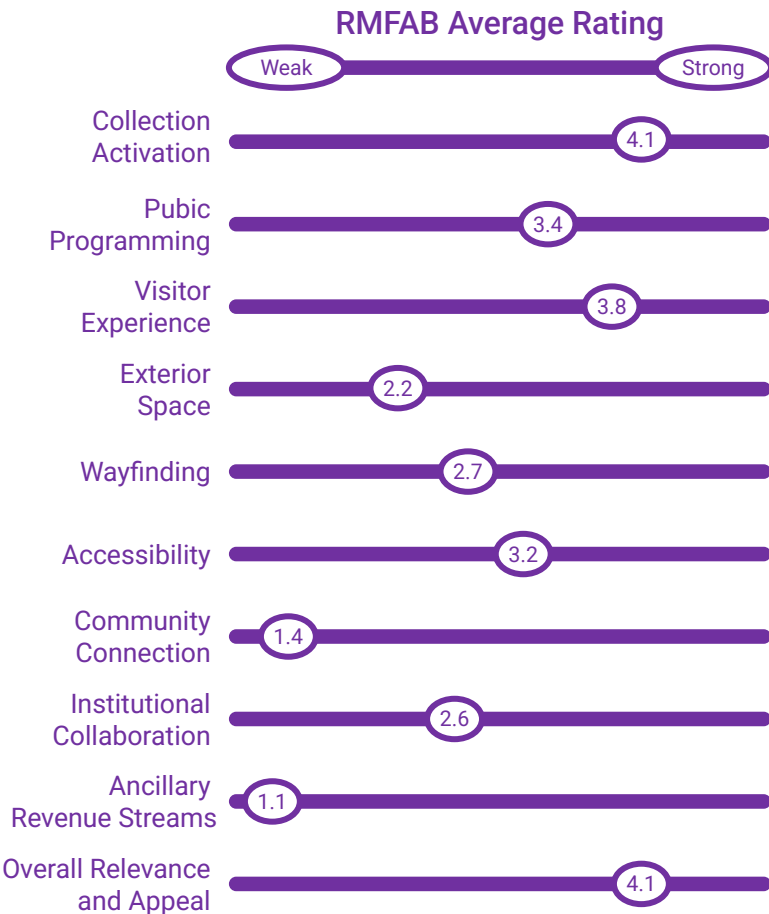
# Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium



# Overall Impression

RMFAB house a nationally significant collection with rich historical depth. But the current visitor experience often feels geared toward art connoisseurs, offering limited relevance or emotional accessibility for a broader audience.

**Future Vision:** Target accessibility, atmosphere, and collection activation. By enhancing wayfinding, creating more inviting environments, curating with an eye on connection, and collaborating with the local community, RMFAB can transform from a siloed institution into a welcoming and relevant cultural experience.

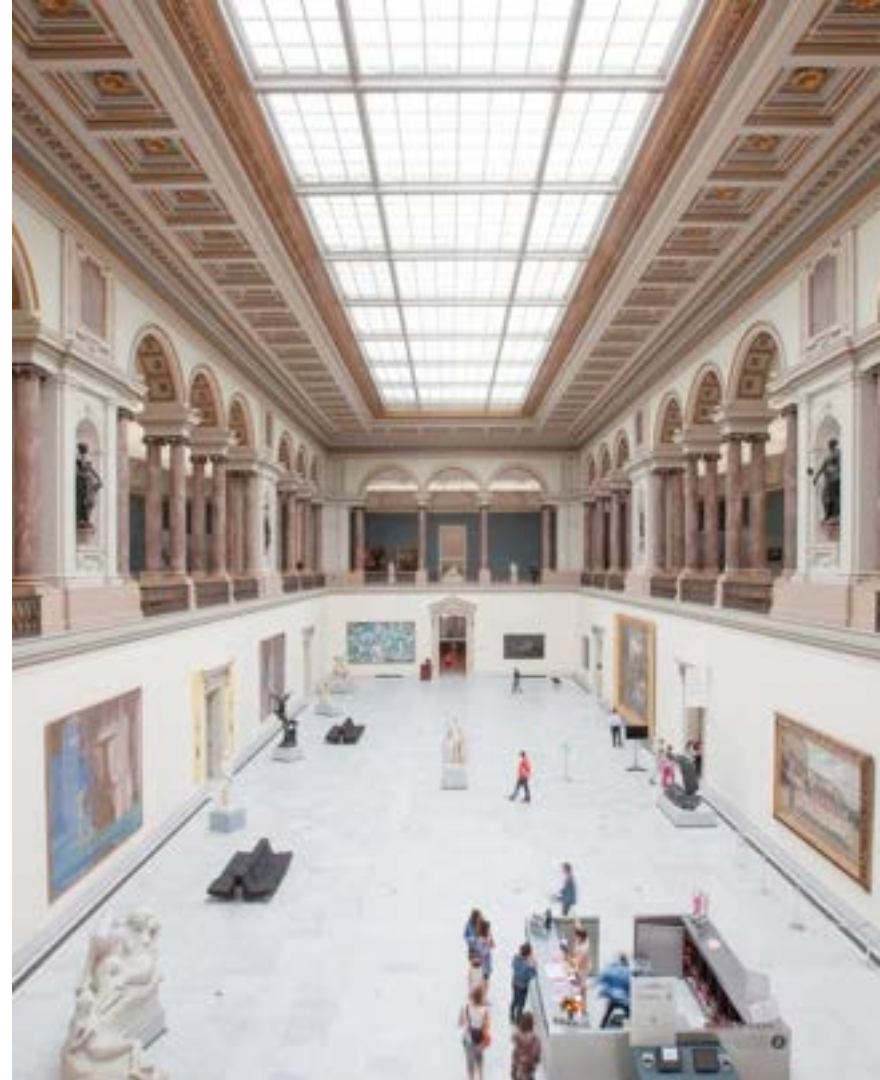


## Building & Infrastructure: Strengths

**Monumental Setting:** Architecturally significant buildings offer grandeur, history, and a memorable physical and symbolic presence in Brussels' urban fabric.

**Expansive Interiors:** Large, flexible gallery spaces accommodate major exhibitions and adaptive reuse for programming, workshops, and installations.

**Sculpture Garden Potential:** Outdoor spaces provide rare opportunities for activation, seasonal events, and circulation improvements linking to nearby institutions.





## Building & Infrastructure: Social Listening Insight

"The Fine Arts Museum in Brussels is a treasure trove of beauty and history...The museum's grandeur is matched only by the diverse array of masterpieces adorning its walls...The interplay of light and shadow in the galleries adds a magical touch, enhancing the allure of the artwork...A visit here is not just a glimpse into the past but a timeless experience etched with the beauty of human expression."

- Joseph Contreras  
★★★★★ 1 year ago



## Building & Infrastructure: Opportunities

**Renovate for Access, Flow, and Consistency:** Ensure new construction is intuitive, welcoming, and universally accessible to improve visitor experience and attract broader, more diverse publics.

**Activate Public Spaces:** Restore the café adjacent to the grand hall and animate upper-floor space along the hall's perimeter to encourage exploration, build anticipation for the museum experience, and make the museum feel more relaxed and socially inviting.

**Activate the Sculpture Garden:** Leverage the sculpture garden for outdoor programming, interinstitutional connectivity, and calm and respite.



## Building & Infrastructure: Insights

"Building needs to be renovated. The layout is messy and no consistent appearance."

- Sam Here  
★ 2 months ago

"Paid 18 euros for the special exhibition on surrealism, and the show was really underwhelming. The exhibition is in a basement reminiscent of an airport, which was so sad considering how beautiful the rest of the building is. The paintings would have looked amazing in the architecture of the upper levels—hanging them monotonously in a sterile room was just a shame."

- Morten Bjerre  
★ 1 year ago

Current State: RMFAB

## Collection & Programming: Strengths

**Exceptional Holdings:** Rich and coherent overview of Belgian and European art from the 15th to 20th century across six complementary collections is a must-see for art lovers.

**Blockbuster Exhibitions:** Major shows like *Dalí & Magritte* and *Women. Underexposed* demonstrate capacity to draw large and diverse audiences.

**Magritte Museum:** Thoughtful curation and programming that emphasize contemporary relevance—within a fully activated space—offer a compelling model for engaging young and diverse audiences.





## Collection & Programming: Insights

"...a must-visit for art lovers.

The museum houses an impressive collection, ranging from classical masterpieces to modern works..."

- Akber Ali

★★★★★ 8 months ago

"...there is so much greatness here people can't help but to gather"

- Alex Matheson

★★★★★ 4 months ago

## Collection & Programming: Opportunities

**Raise to World-Class Standards:** Elevate programming to align with best practices in global museology and institutional communication.

**Co-Create with the Community:** Expand participatory formats that invite public input, diversifying how stories are told and experiences are shaped.

**Connect Past and Present:** Use modern and contemporary lenses to contextualize heritage dynamically and draw new and unfamiliar audiences inward.



## Collection & Programming: Social Listening Insights

"Beautiful and super interesting, I just would have liked to have more information to better understand what we were looking at"

- Lisa Rinaldi  
★★★★ 2 weeks ago

"Children will probably be bored there. If you like art and want to expand your horizons, you must see it. Otherwise, not necessary"

- Jan Kowalski  
★★★★★ 3 months ago

"In short, a completely un-kids-friendly museum, such a shame, and a dusty approach to culture. A museum that would do well to have a makeover and take inspiration from Scandinavian models."

- Marik Lahan  
★ 2 weeks ago



## Visitor Experience: Strengths

**Multi-Museum Access:** Ability to explore several distinct collections under one roof and nearby offers breadth, convenience, and a diverse cultural experience.

**Quiet Contemplation:** Visitors often enjoy uncrowded galleries, fostering a calm, reflective atmosphere rare in major European art institutions.





## Visitor Experience: Social Listening Insights

“World-class collection without the massive crowds of other high-calibre museums. Still a place you can sit and contemplate the art.”

- Matt Huculak  
★★★★★ 10 months ago

“It was very spacious and quiet when we were there on one Tuesday afternoon. You can easily spend 4-5 hours there.”

- Yingchun Ye  
★★★★★ 7 months ago

“It contains lots of masterpieces and the setting and ambiance are one of the best I've witnessed. You have a great sensation of space and tranquility.”

- Razvan S  
★★★★★ 1 year ago

“A superb experience. A moment of calm and peace in the heart of Brussels.”

- Nour Bounghab  
★★★★★ 3 weeks ago

## Visitor Experience: Opportunities

**Modernize Ticketing:** Update online and on-site systems to improve flexibility, bundling, and ease of access to exhibitions and experiences.

**Train Frontline Staff:** Invest in welcoming, multilingual visitor services to enhance public engagement and foster a more inclusive environment.

**Expand Accessibility:** Improve physical, sensory, and digital access to provide intuitive wayfinding, better serve disabled visitors, and meet universal design standards.



## Visitor Experience: Social Listening Insights

"Very bad experience at the cashier desk. The employee was openly unfriendly ... bordering on passive aggressive. Hopefully this was unrelated to the fact that we're a mixed race family."

- Q. GRD  
★ 2 weeks ago

"The staff at the ticket desk was so rude and cold, maybe because I am not of European origin ... Her attitude during the purchase process was so disappointing for a staff member in a ROYAL MUSEUM..."

- Huraku M  
★ 8 months ago

"Worst museum to visit if you are in need of a wheelchair. The staff is simply not prepared to help you. The building is also not prepared for this kind of situation. I have visited a lot of museums in Europe and it was the first time I felt like this. Really shameful."

- Nidia Menino  
★ 1 year ago



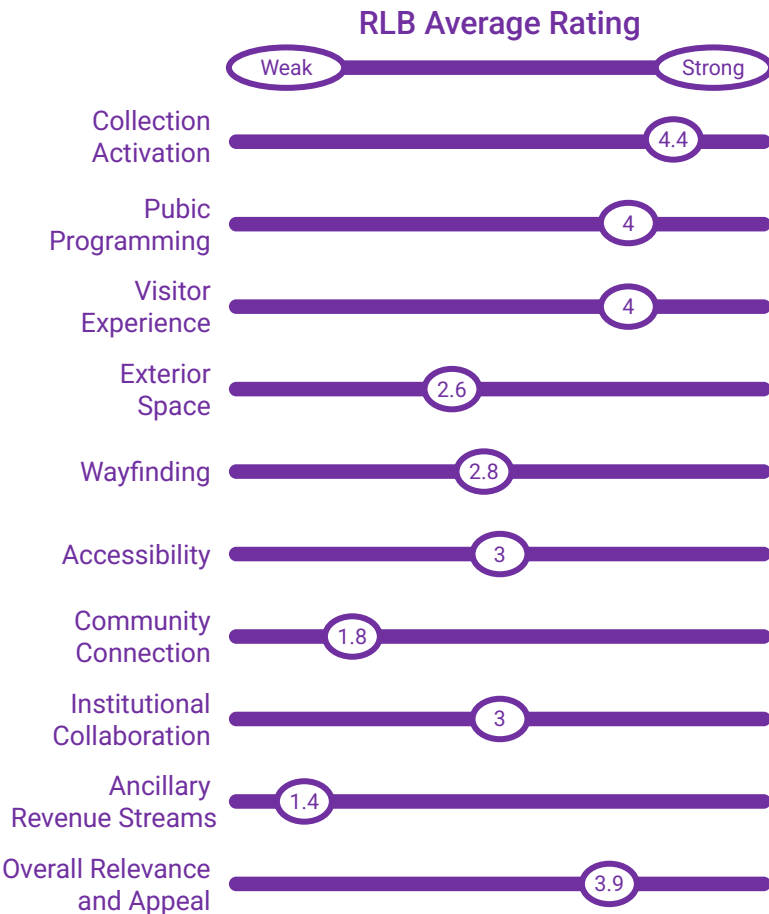
# Royal Library of Belgium



# Overall Impression

RLB aspires to be a “library of the future” rooted in public service, wellness, and civic relevance, and underpinned by a human-centered mindset and digital innovation. Constrained resources and untapped potential restrict its broader impact within the city.

**Future Vision:** Maintain momentum in visitor experience enhancement and embrace “gateway” parallel uses to reach new audiences. Redouble efforts to connect with the community and serve as a dynamic anchor in Brussels' public and cultural life.





Current State: RLB

## Building & Infrastructure: Strengths

**Restorative Patio Space:** The patio already offers calm, greenery, and a contemplative atmosphere, positioning RLB as a space of rest and reflection.

**Rooftop with Expansive Potential:** The rooftop supports both respite and programmatic activation; upcoming elevator improvements will ease access, improve flow, and unlock independent public uses.

**Historic Nassau Chapel:** This richly atmospheric heritage site within RLB provides a powerful setting for cultural programming, historic interpretation, and increased public engagement.



## Building & Infrastructure: Social Listening Insights

"Ideal for finding peace and a place to study in the center of Brussels. The interior courtyard is ideal for taking breaks on a cool bench."

- Nicolas D.  
★★★★ 3 years ago

"A magical place where you go back in time and discover techniques and history, thanks to passionate and fascinating guides"

- Marc Possemiers  
★★★★★ 2 years ago

"The view the rooftop offers of the city center and the roofs of the Albertine are undoubtedly worth the effort of sneaking in or even getting lost in the floors. The rear terrace of the cafeteria is sublimely tranquil, and the view of the colonnades and architectural alignments of the nearby museums is worthy of a panoramic shot from Wings of Desire."

- Jacky Degueudre  
★★★★ 3 years ago

Current State: RLB

## Building & Infrastructure: Opportunities

**Reconnect to the City:** Realize patio project to physically and symbolically connect RLB to adjacent neighborhoods; cultivate stronger connections to the Mont des Arts' public space, including the garden and the iconic stairway overlooking the city.

**Enhance Internal Flow and Usability:** Execute Reading Room project to optimize daylight, sightlines, wayfinding, and function across interior.

**Beautify the Facade:** Dissuade tagging, activate the collection publicly, and encourage curious passersby to enter through temporary or permanent facade installations.





## Building & Infrastructure: Social Listening Insights

"It's quite an ugly place. What a shame for a city like Brussels."

- Matt Huculak  
★ 2 years ago

"If you want to sit in a room with a window to the outside you'll have to book a spot in advance."

- Huayuan Song  
★ 2 years ago

"I passed next to this rather ugly building many times, but had no idea of the treasures that are inside."

- Michał Czaplicki  
★★★★★ 4 years ago

"The surroundings of the entrance are desperately dirty and soiled (what are the Buildings Authority and the public managers of the "National" Library doing?)"

- Jacky Degueldre  
★★★★★ 3 years ago

## Collection, Programming, Services: Strengths

**Exceptional Holdings:** Renowned manuscript, map, music, and print collections—offering scholarly and public value across disciplines and interests.

**Essential Mission:** Clear institutional commitment to democratic, sustainable, and responsible access to knowledge as a public good.

**Public Activation:** Exemplary museum activates the Library's treasures through immersive and interactive exhibitions, drawing wider publics into national heritage.

**Digital Momentum:** Leadership in digital access and metadata collaboration boost mission.





## Collection, Programming, Services: Social Listening Insights

"Gems of books, beautiful manuscripts from the Burgundian periods. Here lies a treasure, not buried, but for anyone who wants to see it. Top museum!"

- Sylvie De Weze  
★★★★ 3 years ago

"A magical place where you go back in time and discover techniques and history, thanks to passionate and fascinating guides"

- Marc Possemiers  
★★★★★ 2 years ago

"A national scientific library with a rich collection of authentic Belgian publications. Here you can study more than 8 million documents & historic manuscripts — world history that goes back to the age of the Dukes of Burgundy."

- Ash KM  
★★★★★ 2 years ago

## Collection, Programming, Services: Opportunities

**Reach World-Class Standards:** Expand programming, services, and access infrastructure in line with global library leaders such as Seattle or Helsinki.

**Enhance Collaboration:** Partner with RMFAB, State Archives, and others to find synergies and create deeper, narrative-rich experiences across collections.

**Activate Collections Creatively:** Scale up programming with artists, writers, musicians, and makers to bring underseen holdings into contemporary cultural life.



## Collection, Programming, Services: Social Listening Insights

"Great way to discover Toots in a wonderful building. The museum lacks the warmth of an art museum. Just some little improvements like a start button for the audio fragments and a wireless audio guide would make the difference. But really worth visiting."

- Glenn Fiddich  
★★★★ 2 years ago

"Small museum about the exceptional collection of manuscripts all made an collected during the Middle Ages. The entrance price is too expensive. For this price you should have an interactive experience, but the information on the screens is general. The museum parcours isn't clearly marked. So you don't have story feeling but more facts next to each other."

- Stijin T'Kindt  
★★★★★ 4 years ago



## Visitor Experience: Strengths

**User-Centric Ethos:** A thoughtful, user-first approach prioritizes usability and accessibility.

**Public Engagement Values:** An inclusive and socially relevant vision of public service.

**Design for Wellness:** Spatial plans emphasize biophilia, calm & wellness, and discovery—aligning with evolving expectations of cultural and civic space.





## Visitor Experience: Social Listening Insights

"Probably one of the best places to study in Brussels...a very calm setting."

- Clément Cœugniet Daems  
★★★★★ 1 year ago

"An absolutely wonderful respite from the warm weather. Lovely rooms, amazing view of the city from the 6th floor, and the staff is exceptional and very helpful!"

- Jennifer Gaylor  
★★★★★ 1 year ago

"What more could you ask for: the team is really great, I was welcomed very warmly and quickly felt "at home." It's comfortable, quiet, and relaxed."

- Sazotek Devinckx  
★★★★★ 4 years ago

## Visitor Experience: Opportunities

**Expand Public-Facing Hours:** Extend core access hours to allow broader audiences—especially students, workers, and families—to engage with RLB’s collection.

**Cultivate Gateway Experiences:** Position albert and the patio as everyday entry points for socializing and relaxation to expand reach and wellness benefit.

**Lower Barriers through Offsites:** Deploy satellite outreach, pop-ups, and urban marketing to build awareness, reduce intimidation, and invite broader publics into RLB.





## Visitor Experience: Social Listening Insights

"I think that the schedule should be modified because closing at 5 p.m. can be counterproductive for students who are in block or who simply want to prepare their courses well. I hope that in the future the schedule will be modified and that the Library will close later."

- Cassandra Gomez  
★★★★ 3 weeks ago

# Key Takeaways





## Key Takeaways: Mont des Arts

### **Embrace localism to complement monumentality.**

Positioning the Mont des Arts as a place for living, not just visiting, will better integrate it into the local cultural ecosystem, improve approachability, and accelerate safety and clean-up efforts—attracting residents and tourists alike.

### **Continue working for coherence, unity, and collaboration.**

Cultivating a strong public-facing brand, cross-programming opportunities, a unified vision for public space, institutional synergies, and clear leadership will accelerate the Mont des Arts' transformation from a collection of institutions to a destination in its own right.

### **Activate space on a human-scale.**

Spatial design for connection, accessibility, and usability will help ensure that the Mont des Arts becomes a vibrant, inviting, and inclusive hub that shares Belgian culture with as many people as possible.

## Key Takeaways: RMFAB

### **Streamline visitor experience.**

Improving layout and wayfinding, training frontline staff, modernizing ticketing, and improving accessibility will drastically improve how visitors enjoy their experience, leading to word-of-mouth recommendations and return visits.

### **Continue working to drive relevance.**

Taking inspiration from forward-looking museological best practices to build on the success of blockbuster exhibitions and other programs will help audiences understand how the collection—and the space that contains it—connects to today.

### **Build deeper relationships with the community.**

Collaborating with community members and local businesses on participatory formats and other programs will foster ownership and belonging while enhancing RMFAB's contemporary local character.

## Key Takeaways: RLB

### **Embrace gateway parallel uses.**

Expanding operating hours and positioning the restaurant and patio as spaces for socialization, relaxation, and connection will boost utilization and give new audiences an opportunity to discover the library's rich holdings.

### **Continue working to improve visitor experience.**

Executing on plans for a new reading room with more natural light, better wayfinding and sight lines, and enhanced usability will attract higher utilization, furthering RLB's vision of serving democratic society and boosting feelings of calm and wellness.

### **Expand programming with a community focus.**

Continuing to work with community groups and Brussels artists on programming that activates RLB's collection and furthers its mission will further build relevance and local appeal.

# Museological Trends and Best Practices





## Overview

1. Behind the Scenes Experiences
2. Museum as Social Commons
3. Reinterpreting the Classics
4. Collaborating Across Disciplines
5. Visitor as Curator
6. Museum as Center of Wellbeing
7. Porosity and Permeability
8. Flexible Spaces
9. Off-site Presence
10. Slow Programming
11. Hybrid Experiences
12. 24-Hour Culture

## Behind the Scenes Experiences

### Concept:

“Lifting the curtain” to provide audiences with physical and digital access to “back of house” activities to create new connections and deepen engagement.

### Impact:

Demystifies and builds trust, providing new ways into the collection and the museum’s operations.

## Behind the Scenes Experiences, Part 1

### *Operation Night Watch: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands*

Beginning in 2019, Operation Night Watch followed the restoration of Rembrandt's famous painting. From behind a glass partition in the gallery, visitors watched as researchers and conservationists brought this legendary work back to life.

The museum's website shared related key research findings and high-resolution imagery and videos.



## Behind the Scenes Experiences, Part 2

### V&A East Storehouse, Stratford, UK

The V&A East Storehouse, which opened May 2025, represents a groundbreaking approach to museum design and public engagement.

The repurposed warehouse transforms the concept of museum storage by making over 250,000 objects and 350,000 books accessible to the public in a dynamic, open-access environment.





## Museum as Social Commons

### Concept:

Reimagining the museum as an inclusive, civic-oriented, participatory environment for gathering and sharing experience.

### Impact:

Strengthens community bonds, increases institutional relevance, removes barriers to access, encourages social dialogue, and increases space utilization.

## Museum as Social Commons

### Museo Egizio, Turino, Italy

Due to open in late 2025, Museo Egizio integrates the museum into Turin's network of public spaces through the new Piazza Egizia.

This glass-covered indoor courtyard will be free to the public and provide access to an Egyptian garden and views of the building's original facade. Programming will be shared between the museum and the city.



## Museum as Social Commons

### Rooftop: Bozar, Brussels, Belgium

In line with Victor Horta's original vision for the building, today Bozar's rooftop serves as an inviting local meet-up spot where people can gather before a performance or relax after work.

Its open-air setting, panoramic views of Brussels, and young, lively audience make it a unique space for connection that integrates culture into daily urban life.

In Brussels



## Museum as Social Commons

### Rooftop: RLB, Brussels, Belgium

With the completion of RLB's elevator project, visitors will be able to access its rooftop and the restaurant *albert* directly from the Mont des Arts' public space.

By combining a stylish dining experience with sweeping city views, a more accessible rooftop will attract a diverse mix of patrons and further RLB's commitment to fostering open, democratic discourse.

In Brussels





## Reinterpreting the Classics

### Concept:

Contemporary artists engage with historical collections in situ through commissioned artworks, installations, or curated exhibitions to reframe institutional narratives.

### Impact:

Sparks fresh dialogue between the canon and contemporary artists, injecting dynamism into heritage while attracting and inspiring new audiences.

## Reinterpreting the Classics

### *O Sentimental Machine: Liebieghaus, Frankfurt, Germany*

William Kentridge's 2018 installation at Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung connected a multi-media installation with a sculpture collection spanning five thousand years.

The inter-departmental installation reactivated almost all the rooms of the Liebieghaus and looked at antiquity through a contemporary lens.



## Reinterpreting the Classics

### *René Magritte x Emily Mae Smith: RMFAB, Brussels, Belgium*

The Magritte Museum regularly invites contemporary artists to put their work in dialogue with its collection.

Emily Mae Smith's 2024-2025 exhibition featured both direct and subtle nods to Magritte's imagery — even incorporating one of the Belgian's canvases into her own work.

In Brussels



## Collaborating Across Disciplines

### Concept:

Artists and scholars — from science, technology, and engineering — co-create exhibitions and programming that bridge disciplines to explore shared questions and societal issues.

### Impact:

Broadens audience appeal beyond art while demonstrating art's relevance to a changing world; elevates local and global issues and pioneers new curatorial forms.

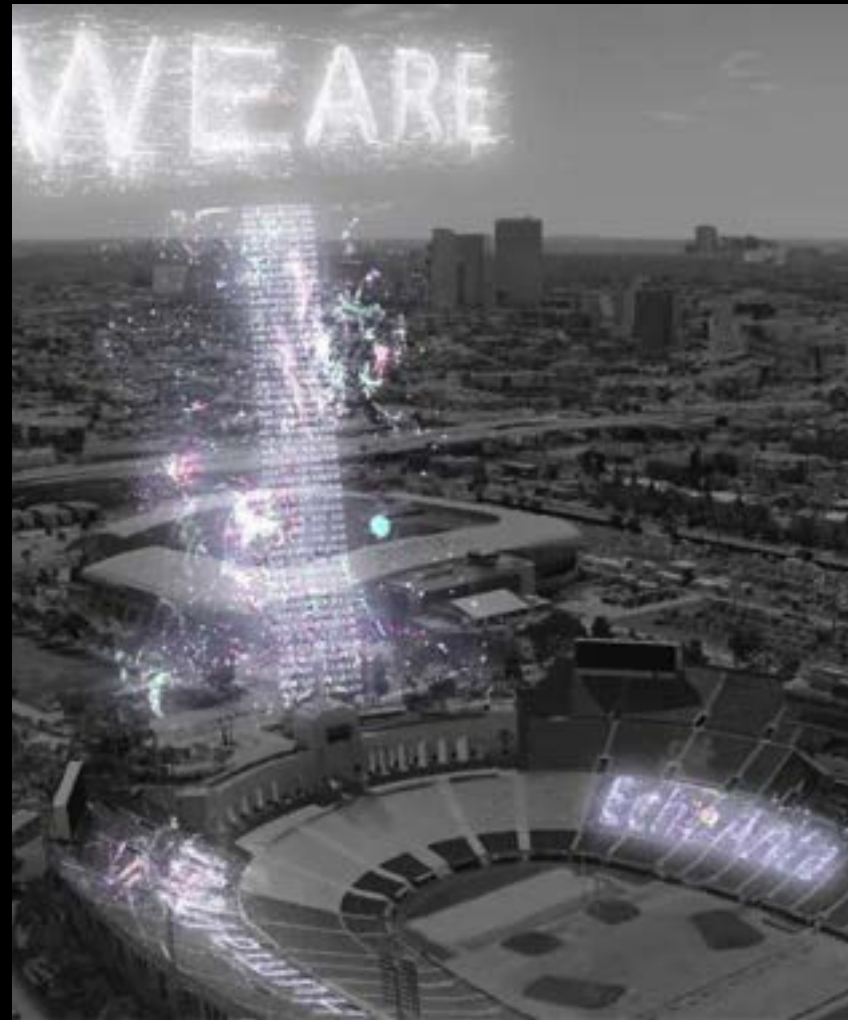


## Collaborating Across Disciplines

### **Art & Science Collide: Pacific Standard Time 2024, Los Angeles, CA, USA**

*Art & Science Collide* built on the history of exchange between the two disciplines in Southern California.

70 institutions across the region collaborated in a series of exhibitions, presentations, events and installations that explored dynamic intersections of art, culture and technology.



## Collaborating Across Disciplines

### Ysaÿe Rediscovered: RLB, Bozar, MIM et al., Brussels, Belgium

On the occasion of the Belgian National Orchestra's European premiere of a composition by Eugène Ysaÿe rediscovered in Bozar's archives, RLB, Bozar, MIM, and other institutions teamed up on a series of lectures and performances that sought to better understand the contemporary relevance of the Belgian violinist and composer.

In Brussels



## Visitor as Curator

### Concept:

Layered or parallel experience tracks — such as soundscapes, games, performances, personalized programming, or community archives — that enable visitors to create and “curate” their own museum experience.

### Impact:

Customizes and personalizes the museum visit, expanding reach and empowering the visitor to craft their own path of discovery.

# Visitor as Curator

## The O Smartphone App: Museum of Old & New Art, Tasmania, Australia

In place of wall labels, this easy smartphone app allows the user to decide how much and what type of information they want and need to know about each artwork.

Visitors self-curate their experience, choosing if and when they want to. As the Museum says: “Use it or ignore it entirely. We don’t make the rules.”

### ARTWORK LIST



### ARTWORK PAGE





## Visitor as Curator

### Interactive Wristbands: RLB, Brussels, Belgium

The RLB Museum's interactive wristbands allow visitors to choose their own path as they learn about the library of the Dukes of Burgundy.

At designated spots throughout the museum, scanning a wristband will bring up either “playful” or “expert” information about the artifacts.

In Brussels



## Museum as Center of Wellbeing

### Concept:

Using art's ability to boost positive health outcomes by serving as partners in public health and wellbeing. This includes programs catering to the youth, the elderly, neurodivergent people, and people with disabilities and cognitive ailments.

### Impact:

Expands the museum's function beyond enjoyment and education to helping and healing, providing more expansive and needs-based audience impact.

## Museum as Center of Wellbeing

### Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada

Starting in 2017, a resident Art Therapist has spearheaded a range of social prescribing initiatives at MMFA that activate art to cater to the needs of diverse audiences.

Rigorous data collection on visitor experience enables a better understanding of the effects of art and artmaking on wellness and the further evolution of MMFA's wellness initiatives.



## Museum as Center of Wellbeing

### Museum Prescriptions: City Culture Department, Brussels, Belgium

Beginning in the wake of COVID-19, doctors in Brussels collaborated with 5 area museums to offer free access to patients suffering from pandemic-related mental illness.

After a three-year pilot program, Brussels' museum prescription program has now expanded to include 18 participating medical facilities and 13 participating museums.

In Brussels





## Porosity and Permeability

### Concept:

Creating physical spaces that integrate natural elements, outdoor access and ecological flows into built environments. This promotes fluidity between indoor and outdoor spaces and builds connection to the world around the museum.

### Impact:

Situates the museum within its neighborhood/environment; conveys openness and transparency, highlights the sensory, promotes environmental connection and amplifies wellness benefits from exposure to nature.

## Porosity and Permeability

### Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebaek, Denmark

Known as an idyllic haven where art, architecture, and nature converge, Louisiana was among the first arts organizations to reimagine an art museum beyond a “white cube.”

The museum blurs the line between indoor and outdoor, integrating the collection into the surrounding nature and encouraging outdoor recreation on the museum grounds.



## Flexible Spaces

### Concept:

Building flexibility into physical spaces by embracing modular, mobile and reconfigurable spatial design allows for diverse and evolving uses.

### Impact:

Maximizes organizational utility, enhances existing and generates new revenue streams and helps the museum be dynamic and ever-changing to the audience.

## Flexible Spaces

### Perelman Performing Arts Center, New York, NY, USA

Designed as a place of community and culture, the Perelman Center appears as a simple cube that reveals its internal complexity over time.

With its unique modular layout system, the theater spaces can be reconfigured into 62 possible stage-audience configurations that give audiences something unexpected at every visit.





## Off-Site Presence

### Concept:

Expanding beyond the museum's core buildings through satellite sites, mobile units and temporary activations in local or remote locations.

### Impact:

Brings the museum to new audiences, increases visibility and accessibility and embeds it more deeply into the fabric of the city.

## Off-Site Presence

### Mandala Lab: Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art, Worldwide

The Rubin's traveling Mandala Lab channels Buddhist principles through interactive sensory experiences that foster emotional and cultural learning.

From New York to Bilbao, London, and Milan, the Lab expands the museum's reach and supports its transition to a global "museum without a building."



## Slow Programming

### Concept:

A response to resourcing concerns, as well as staff and audience fatigue, “slow programming” features fewer exhibitions and more long-duration projects.

### Impact:

Reduces carbon emissions and alleviates logistical pressure while supporting a shift from spectacle to sustainable. Motivates staff and signals institutional environmental values.

## Slow Programming

### Serpentine Galleries, London, UK

In addition to prioritizing sustainability initiatives like reducing travel and minimizing energy use, Serpentine Galleries has committed to reducing the number of exhibitions held annually and extending the duration of projects on display.

Staggering program schedules and expanding digital offerings enable the Serpentine to maintain momentum across both platforms.





## Hybrid Experiences

### Concept:

Integrating on-site and digital experiences to create seamless, multilayered engagement across physical, virtual, and augmented environments.

### Impact:

Expands access to reach both local and global audiences, deepens interpretation, increases options for educational offerings, and provides novel and unexpected experiences to attract and sustain new audiences.

## Hybrid Experiences

### HistoPad: Notre-Dame de Paris, Paris, France

An augmented reality tool that activates the history of Notre-Dame de Paris by combining scholarship with 3D technology to create a lively new learning experience.

The interactive visualization brings significant events in the history of Notre-Dame to life, including glimpses into the historic construction and recent reconstruction of the cathedral.



## Hybrid Experiences

### City Game Coudenberg: Coudenberg Palace, Brussels, Belgium

An app-based role-playing game plunges the user into the 17th century as a young architect hoping to enter the service of the royal court.

Puzzles, challenges, and other fun activities encourage the user to explore the Royal District as they work to secure the Golden Key to the Coudenberg Palace.

In Brussels



## 24-Hour Culture

### Concept:

To revitalize sleepy neighborhoods, cultural institutions are extending hours, offering evening cultural activities, promoting local nightlife and providing lifestyle amenities.

### Impact:

Expands reach to new audiences, increases visibility, nurtures local culture, enhances safety in the area, increases space utilization and dwell time and potentially generates new revenue streams.



## 24-Hour Culture

### Lates: Tate Modern, London, UK

A mix of workshops, talks, films, live music, food, and interactive experiences, Tate Modern Lates animate its Bankside home after-hours.

Each event is themed around a current exhibition or a collaboration with an artist or celebrity. The program provides an alternative time and fun way to experience the museum while supporting the evolution of its neighborhood.



## 24-Hour Culture

### Nocturnes, Museum Night Fever, Halles St. Géry: Brussels, Belgium

Throughout Brussels, a mix of recurring and permanent programs is making culture more accessible and weaving it into the city's nightlife.

Nocturnes and Museum Night Fever open museum doors after hours with workshops, behind-the-scenes tours, and performances, while Halles Saint-Géry operates as an “always-on” cultural hub — combining exhibitions and live events with food and drink for a seamless, social experience.



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# Urban Revitalization: Trends and Best Practices





## Overview

1. Adaptive Reuse
2. Wayfinding as Experience
3. Interstitial Activation
4. Cultivating a Local Creative Ecosystem
5. Connecting Culture and Recreation
6. Placemaking through Outdoor Art
7. Building Pathways
8. Celebrating Contemporary Regional Culture
9. Pedestrian-First Urbanism
10. Commissioning Temporary Architecture

## Adaptive Reuse

### Concept:

Embedding civic memory and layered histories into the built environment of a city through adaptive reuse of historic architecture for new cultural, social and creative purposes.

### Impact:

Fosters cultural understanding and civic cohesion by making history a visible part of daily life. Strengthens local identity, reduces environmental impact through reuse and increases the inclusivity and dynamism of cultural infrastructure.

## Adaptive Reuse

### Musée de la Romanité, Nîmes, France

The city of Nîmes is known for well-preserved ruins dating back to the Roman Empire. When designing and building the archaeological museum, the goal was to create a dialogue between the modern construction and the Roman era ruins nearby.

During construction, additional ruins were discovered and incorporated into a garden on museum grounds.



## Adaptive Reuse

### Nassau Chapel: RLB, Brussels, Belgium

Integrated into RLB's modernist building is the Brabantine Gothic Nassau Chapel, the only surviving portion of the Palace of Nassau.

Now part of the RLB Museum and brought to life through acoustically faithful recorded chants, live performances, and more, the 16th-century chapel serves as a striking reminder of the site's heritage—connecting contemporary visitors with the city's past.

In Brussels





## Wayfinding as Experience

### Concept:

Signage and navigation tools are deployed as cultural media to tell stories, build a sense of place, and deepen engagement with everything a city has to offer.

### Impact:

Fosters accessibility without compromising discovery and exploration. Sense of discovery builds emotional connection by uncovering and connecting stories.

## Wayfinding as Experience

### Vitra Museum Designweg: Weil am Rhein, Germany

An addition to the public space around the Vitra Campus, Designweg is a series of twelve columns showcasing scale models of classic furniture designs.

A tiny open-air museum, these Vitra miniatures lead visitors from the tram stop to the campus, building curiosity while providing clear wayfinding.



## Interstitial Activation

### Concept:

Overlooked or “dead” spaces are reimagined as micro-destinations through interventions that integrate with their surroundings, such as gardens, performance spaces, retail pop-ups, temporary exhibitions, food & beverage and gathering spaces.

### Impact:

Transforms forgotten spaces into connective tissue, adding vibrancy, cohesion and discovery to the everyday cityscape. Enhances walkability, encourages exploration, and increases safety.

## Interstitial Activation

### The High Line, New York, NY, USA

Built on an elevated rail line that was destined for demolition, the High Line was designed to be a place of community and connection through a range of outdoor experiences and amenities.

The High Line has transformed a dark and closed-off urban corridor into a lively garden walk and must-see destination for locals and visitors alike. It is estimated that 1 of every 8 tourists to New York now visits the High Line.





## Cultivating a Local Creative Ecosystem

### Concept:

Urban districts are transformed into hubs for cultural production, craft, design and creative entrepreneurship by working with existing cultural attractions and building out affordable creative infrastructure.

### Impact:

Drives local economic growth, community identity and creative innovation while attracting diverse audiences to the area. Promotes collaboration and cross-visitation to increase visit and linger times.

## Cultivating a Local Creative Ecosystem

### MuseumsQuartier (MQ) Cultural Attractions, Vienna, Austria

A cultural destination and one of the largest districts for contemporary art and culture in the world, MQ is home to Vienna's museums and over 50 initiatives from the cultural and creative fields, including performing arts, game development, fashion, publishing and artists-in-residence.

MQ physically unifies Vienna's diverse artistic subcultures and propels its economic impact.



## Connecting Culture and Recreation

### Concept:

Cities are increasingly looking to connect culture to garden corridors, bike trails, and other urban greenspaces, promoting recreation and cultural appreciation.

### Impact:

Reduces local traffic by encouraging locals to utilize modes of sustainable mobility. Boosts wellness while enabling cultural discovery through the creation of layered urban experiences.

## Connecting Culture and Recreation

### Art Trail: Crystal Bridges, Bentonville, AR, USA

The experience of nature is central to the mission of Crystal Bridges, committed to both conserving the native wildlife on their campus and providing ways for the public to interact with the environment.

Over five miles of biking and hiking trails wind through a landscape of native managed forest and art installations, giving visitors and locals the opportunity to enjoy the mingling of art and nature.



## Placemaking through Outdoor Art

### Concept:

Large, site-specific art installations utilized for storytelling and placemaking monuments that explore local identity and invite interaction.

### Impact:

Public art builds emotional ties and excitement for places by becoming a recognizable emblem for the area, serving as a landmark for wayfinding, a way to modernize underused space and a spark for conversation and community.



## Placemaking through Outdoor Art

### Cloud Gate, Millennium Park, Chicago, IL, USA

Affectionately known as “The Bean,” Anish Kapoor’s large sculpture *Cloud Gate* quickly became one of Chicago’s most prominent sights when it was installed in 2004.

Widely considered Kapoor’s most famous work, *Cloud Gate* reflects its surroundings and invites visitors to walk around and underneath, touch the surface and interact with their own reflection. It has become a wayfinding tool, a meeting place and an iconic symbol of Chicago.



## Building Pathways

### Concept:

Adjacent cultural institutions connect through creatively designed tunnels or covered passages, providing audiences with unexpected and enjoyable art experiences.

### Impact:

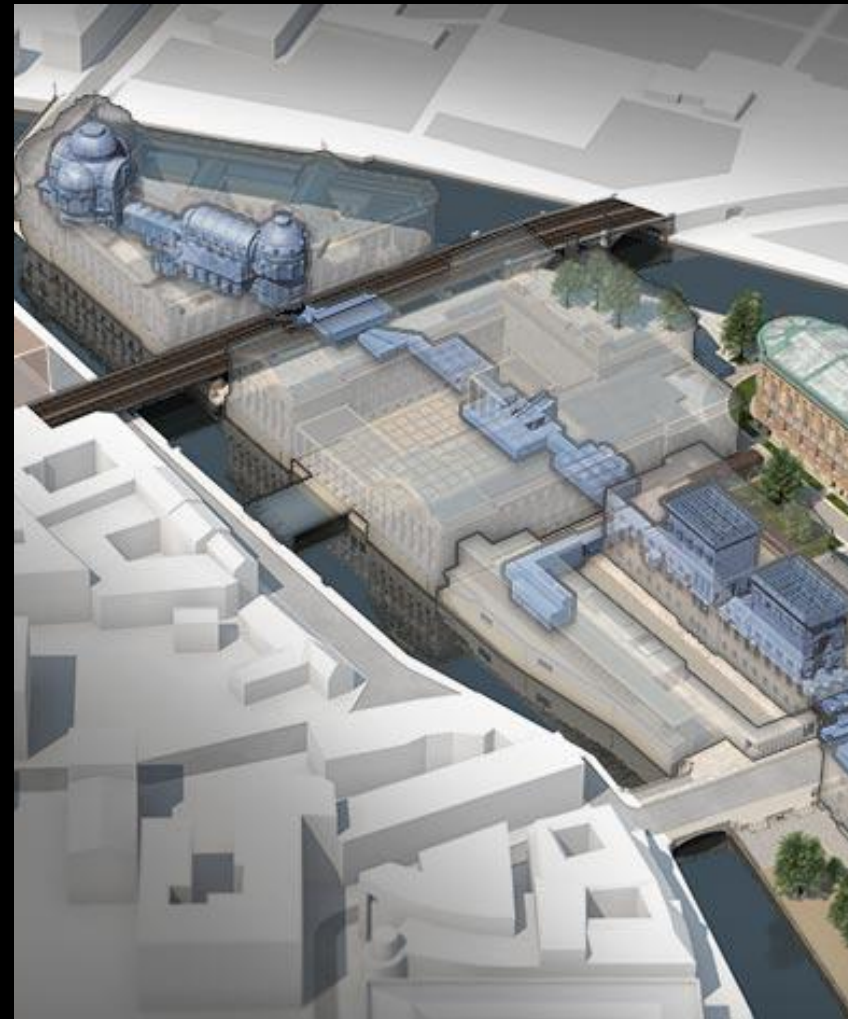
Encourages cross-institutional collaborations, increases visitor dwell time, reduces potential hesitation associated with harsh weather and improves local accessibility.

## Building Pathways

### Archeological Promenade: Museum Island, Berlin, Germany

Part of the Museum Island master plan for the future, the Archeological Promenade will be a mostly subterranean pathway that connects four institutions through a mix of passages and large “courtyard” rooms.

The promenade will be considered an additional museum on the island and will include exhibition space for interdisciplinary presentations and other cultural programming.



## Celebrating Contemporary Regional Culture

### Concept:

New institutions and cultural destinations are celebrating the contemporary creativity of their region in active, integrated galleries and outdoor spaces.

### Impact:

Demonstrates regional relevance by showcasing the work of living artists and other creatives. Connects to the contemporary world and attracts younger visitors.

## Celebrating Contemporary Regional Culture

### Naoshima New Museum of Art, Benesse Art Site, Naoshima, Japan

With the recent opening of the Naoshima New Museum of Art, Benesse Art Site Naoshima turns its focus to contemporary Asian culture.

Housed in a Tadao Ando building inspired by its surroundings, the museum features a collection rich in new commissions, showcasing the best of recent Asian creativity to the world.





## Pedestrian-First Urbanism

### Concept:

Transforming car-dominated streets into walkable, human-scale public realms that prioritize pedestrians, cyclists and social life.

### Impact:

Reduces noise and pollution, supports local business, promotes “slow enjoyment” and fosters accessible, inclusive civic spaces.

## Pedestrian-First Urbanism

### Piazza del Duomo, Florence, Italy

In 2010, the City of Florence began pedestrianizing their streets with the area directly surrounding their iconic Duomo. This change opened up better views of the landmark, increased safety for pedestrians, and reduced pollution affecting the historic buildings.

Florence has since expanded their car-free zones throughout the city and made changes to their public transportation system to further accommodate locals and reduce car traffic.



## Commissioning Temporary Architecture

### Concept:

Temporary architecture “curated” by neighboring cultural organizations to showcase new style and talent and draw interest to the area through an ongoing series of changing commissions.

### Impact:

Provides a dynamic way for the public to experience contemporary architecture and design; enlivens the location and creates ongoing series of new experiences so that the space never becomes “tired” or outdated.

## Commissioning Temporary Architecture

### Serpentine Pavilion: Serpentine Gallery, London, UK

From its first commission 25 years ago with architect Zaha Hadid, the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens established an annual program that has become one of London's most anticipated summer events, drawing locals and tourists alike.

The Serpentine Pavilion has now become a signature event, activating its adjacent lawn with an immersive and experiential space that signals creativity and innovation.





## Commissioning Temporary Architecture

### Bozar Monumental: Bozar, Brussels, Belgium

Beginning in 2025, Bozar will activate its Horta Hall through temporary sculptural and architectural installations, an initiative inspired by Victor Horta's original conception of the space as a sculpture hall.

For the first edition, Michael Beutler will construct a massive rotating platform "floating" on water that will encourage passers-by to slow down and explore the space.





## Recap

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# Urban Revitalization: Case Studies in Europe's Cultural Capitals



London



Copenhagen



Paris



Vienna



Berlin

## London: Bankside

### Ceding Power to Culture

1994 – 2016

The transformation of the derelict Bankside Power Station into Tate Modern, opening in 2000, catalyzed the regeneration of London's South Bank, turning it into a vibrant cultural district.

**Key Players:** Tate Gallery, Herzog & de Meuron, London Borough of Southwark, UK National Lottery Fund, EDF Energy



## Urban Revitalization: Case Studies in Europe's Cultural Capitals

# London: Bankside

### Themes in Action

- *Adaptive Reuse*: Reactivated industrial elements blend history with contemporary design.
- *24-Hour Culture*: New restaurants and bars extend stays and attract new audiences.
- *Interstitial Activation*: Turbine Hall installations turn the Tate's entrance into a destination in its own right.

### Impacts

- *Visitor Surge*: Tate Modern attracted over 5 million visitors to the area in its first year.
- *Economic Boost*: Within a year of opening, £50-70M of local economic benefit, with over 23% growth in hospitality.
- *Cultural Influence*: Bankside has redefined London's cultural landscape and positioned it as contemporary art leader.





## Copenhagen: Cultural District

### Bridging Heritage and Modernity

2014 – Present

In 2014, a coalition of 17 cultural institutions within a 10-minute walk of each other formed the Copenhagen Cultural District. This initiative aimed to position the area as the city's cultural nucleus, enhancing urban spaces and fostering collaboration among institutions.

**Key Players:** Copenhagen Cultural District Association, Danish Parliament, Copenhagen City, Agency of Culture & Palaces, Realdania By & Byg





## Copenhagen: Cultural District

### Trends in Action

- *Celebrating Contemporary Regional Culture:* Focus on Danish architecture and young artists builds local spirit.
- *Connecting Culture & Recreation:* Docks, gyms, paths, and an amusement park complement culture with fun and wellness.
- *Cultivating a Local Creative Ecosystem:* Co-working space, think tanks, and nonprofits foster living culture and creativity.

### Impacts

- Global Recognition: Top rankings in livability and happiness indexes and 2023 UNESCO "World Capital of Architecture" award reflect cultural vibrancy.
- Social Resilience: Broader strategy driving district results in growth in international residency and less unemployment.



## Paris: Les Halles

### (Re-)modernizing a Historic Market

2002 – 2016

In 2010, the unpopular Forum Les Halles complex, constructed in the 1970s to replace Paris' central food market, was demolished and redesigned to reconnect Paris' historic core as a modern hub of culture, commerce, and transit.

**Key Players:** Paris city government, mall operator, transit operator, architect teams, cultural institutions



## Paris: Les Halles

### Themes in Action

- *Placemaking through Outdoor Art*: an iconic undulating roof provides light-filled public space.
- *Pedestrian-First Urbanism*: freedom from vehicular traffic encourages lingering.
- *24-Hour Culture*: Retail, culture, and a transport hub keep the area buzzing through the night.

### Impacts

- Higher Footfall: ca. 50 million visits/yr (2019) makes it France's busiest shopping center.
- Economic Boost: 168 shops on site inject vitality into local commerce, supporting jobs and tax revenue.
- Improved Social Network: Formerly disjointed neighborhoods reconnected by new amenities





## Vienna: MuseumsQuartier

### Courtyards of Creativity

1998 – Present

The derelict Baroque stables of the Hofburg palace were transformed into a massive mixed-use cultural complex, melding historic architecture with contemporary design and public space.

**Key Players:** City of Vienna, Federal Ministry of Arts & Culture, MuseumsQuartier Wien GmbH, Ortner&Ortner, private donors, commercial sponsors, tenant institutions



## Vienna: MuseumsQuartier

### Themes in Action

- *Museum(s) as Social Commons*: An activated common courtyard with leisure offerings encourages gathering.
- *Adaptive Reuse*: Converted stable buildings preserve heritage while activating it with contemporary culture.
- *Cultivating a Local Creative Ecosystem*: "Cultural Tenants" and artist residencies enliven the atmosphere and complement art & heritage offerings.

### Impacts

- Major Footfall: ca. 4.5M annual visitors
- Economic & Social Boost: Revitalized downtown Vienna, with tourism driving growth across all areas of hospitality.
- Cultural Accessibility: Free and low-cost programs increase access and encourage discovery.





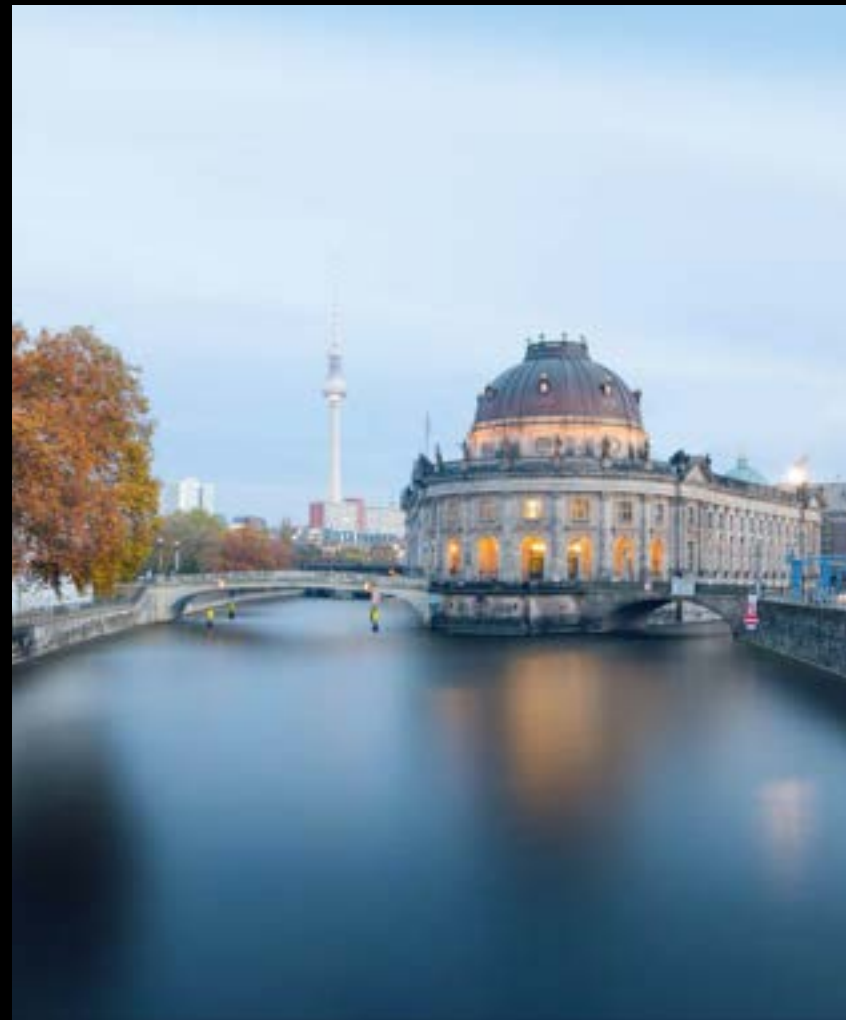
## Berlin: Museuminsel

### Building New Connections

1999 – Present

Post-reunification, Berlin has reunited East/West collections and launched an ambitious master plan to restore and expand the 19th–20th-century museum ensemble, enhancing narrative flow and public access.

**Key Players:** Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Federal & City governments, David Chipperfield Architects, preservation authorities



## Urban Revitalization: Case Studies in Europe's Cultural Capitals

# Berlin: Museuminsel

### Trends in Action

- *Building Pathways:* A central entrance point consolidates service functions, reducing strain and congestion.
- *Pedestrian-First Urbanism:* Limited traffic encourages dwelling while enhancing sustainability and safety.
- *Interstitial Activation:* Green space and an archaeological promenade contribute to a cohesive, engaging cultural experience.

### Impacts

- **Global Recognition:** Master plan contributed to recognition as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1999.
- **Visitor Draw:** With ca. 3M annual visitation pre-Covid, the island anchors Berlin's tourist economy.
- **Enhanced Access:** New entrances and connections improved navigability and wayfinding.



# The Future of the Mont des Arts



## Overview

Best practices provide inspiration for the future of the Mont des Arts, but they must be considered as complementary components within a cohesive vision for transformation. This means interrogating them from a common understanding of:

- Its Unique Position in Brussels
- Recent Changes and Momentum
- Top-Level Directions for Future Growth
- The Potential Benefits of Transformation





## A 21st-Century Cultural Capital

As Brussels is poised to emerge as a 21st-century cultural capital, a revitalized Mont des Arts has a unique capacity to enrich Brussels' local ecosystem while amplifying its global appeal.



## Direction Forward

**Bring Brussels to the Mont des Arts, and the world will follow.**

The Mont des Arts must transform...

**From:**

A Postcard of Belgian Heritage

Monumental, but Underutilized

A Collection of Cultural Institutions

**To:**

A Thriving Local Community with Global Appeal

Human-Scaled, Welcoming, Fully Active

A Cultural Destination

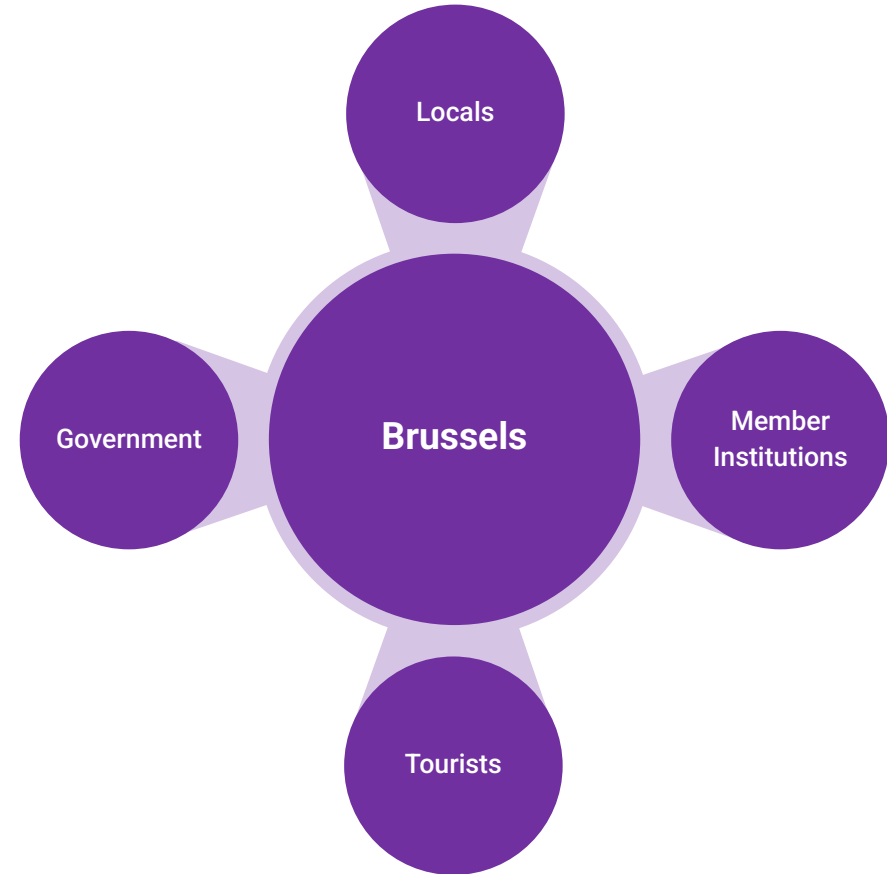
A hand-drawn architectural floor plan of a building, likely a school or institutional structure, with various rooms and handwritten annotations. The plan includes a central corridor and several rooms, some of which are shaded in yellow. Annotations include:

- Top Left:** "Coun. Room" (Counselor's Room) and "Office of the Principal".
- Top Center:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Top Right:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Center:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Bottom Left:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Bottom Center:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Bottom Right:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
- Far Right:** "Office of the Principal" (repeated).
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## Benefits of Revitalization

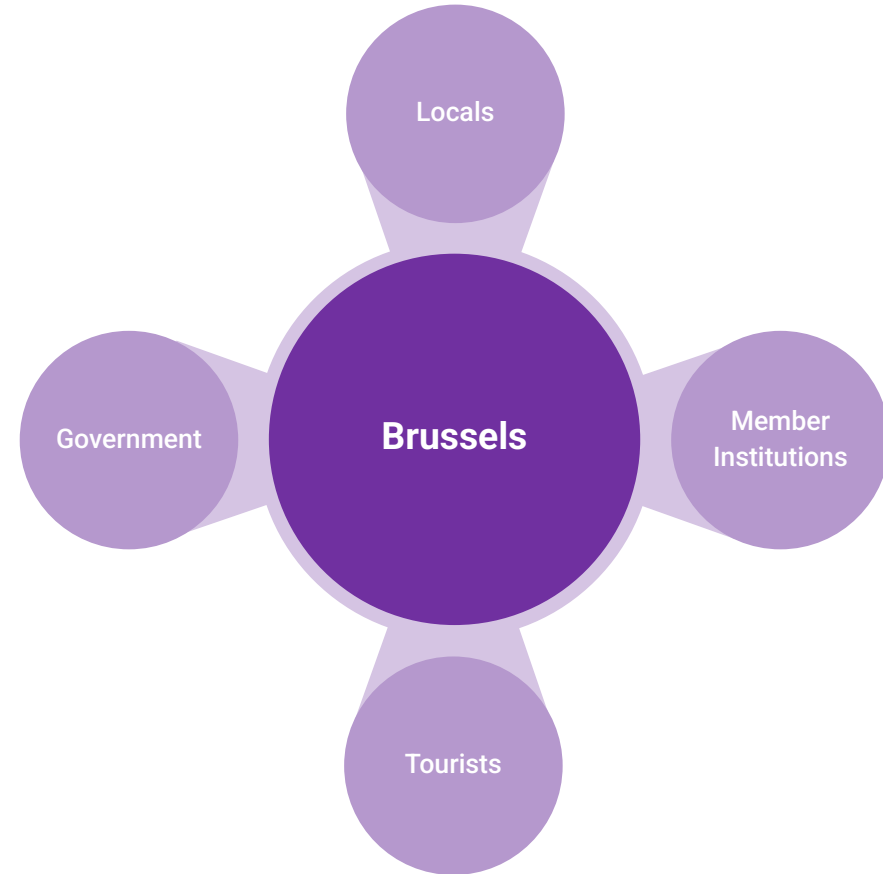
A revitalized Mont des Arts holds direct benefits for its key stakeholders and audiences.





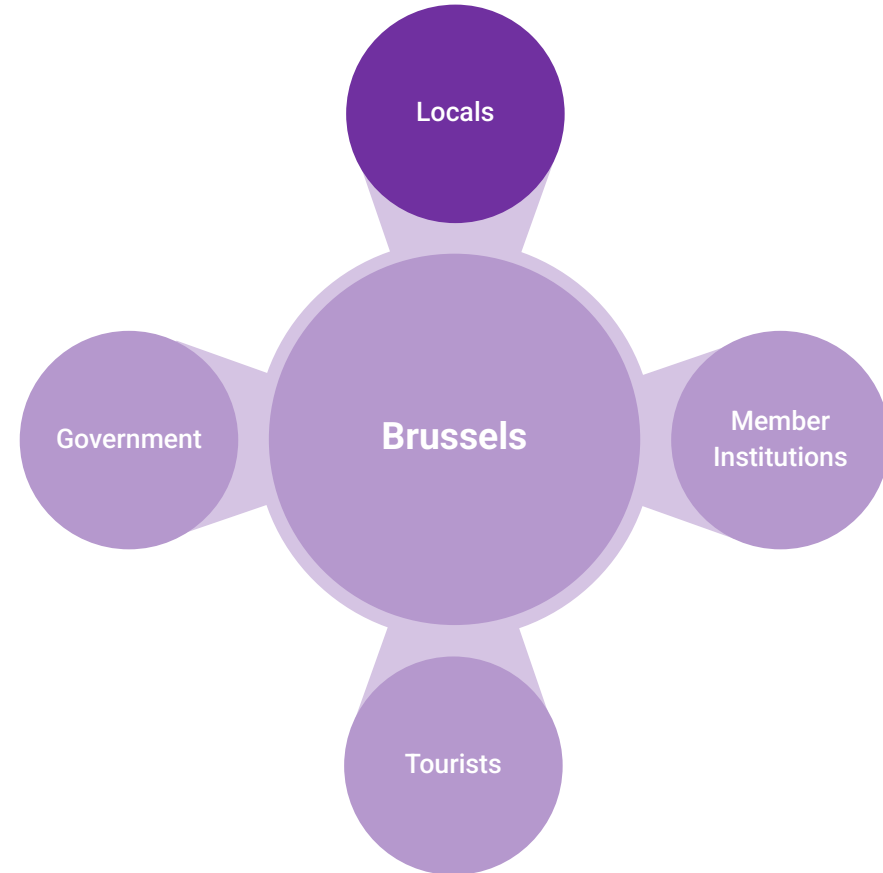
## Benefits: Brussels

- **21st-Century Identity:** Contributes to a forward-looking vision of modern Brussels that celebrates its heritage and its evolving civic and cultural DNA.
- **Cultural Capital Status:** Elevates Brussels as a leading European hub for arts, culture and public life.
- **Economic Boost:** Enhances creative and tourism ecosystems, increasing revenues and creating opportunity.
- **Urban Fabric:** Democratizes public space, fosters community and civic pride and improves quality of life.



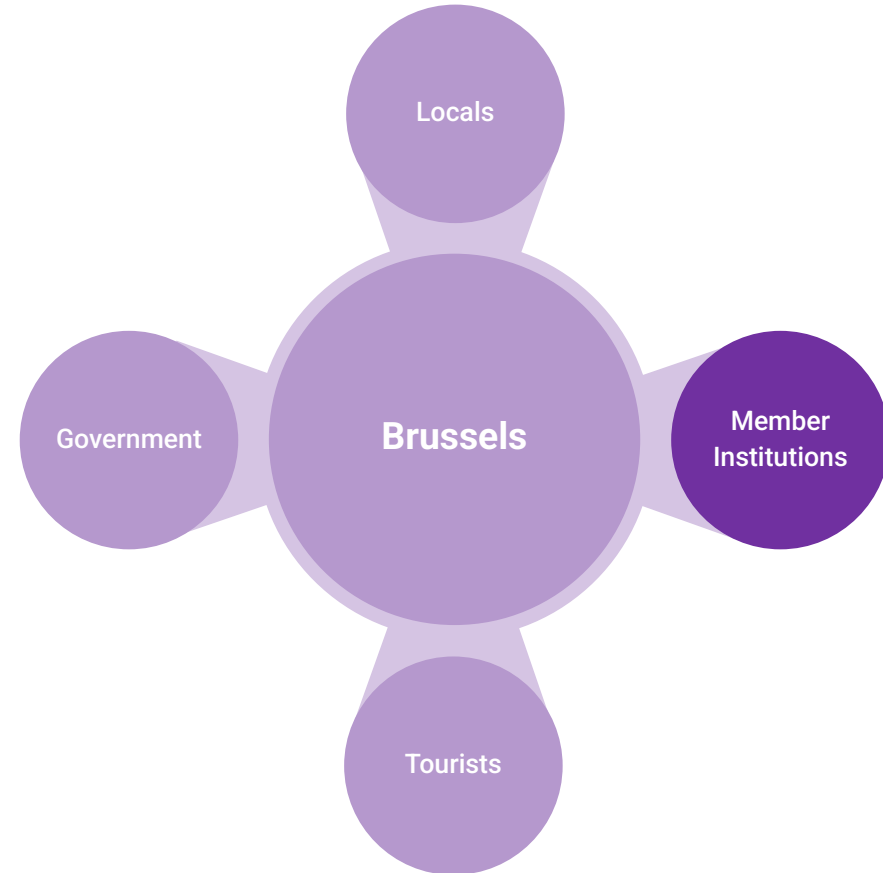
## Benefits: Locals

- **New Public Space:** Transforms a once-imposing area into a walkable, welcoming space that supports rest, recreation and wellbeing.
- **Community Gathering Hub:** Creates a shared place for community connection enhanced by new dining, retail and nightlife.
- **Everyday Cultural Access:** Makes cultural experiences part of the area's daily life via flexible, outdoor programming.
- **Civic Pride & Belonging:** Connects residents more deeply to cultural heritage, as well as Brussels' history and evolving role in Europe.



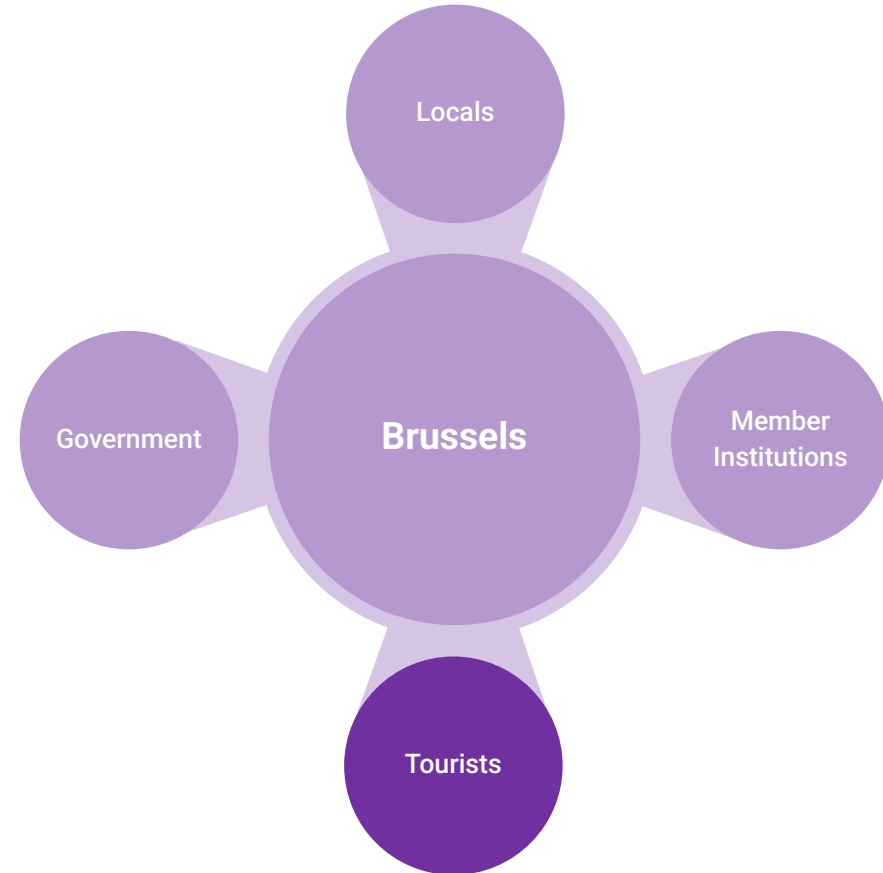
## Benefits: Member Institutions

- **Increased Foot Traffic & Visibility:** Revitalizes surroundings to invite casual visitors and expand exposure for all participating institutions.
- **Audience Diversification:** Helps attract new publics, especially younger and more diverse audiences through accessible programming.
- **Platform for Experimentation:** Offers space and occasion for testing new formats, collaborations, and participatory experiences.
- **Shared Resources & Synergies:** Fosters efficiencies across institutions through shared programming, promotion, and infrastructure.



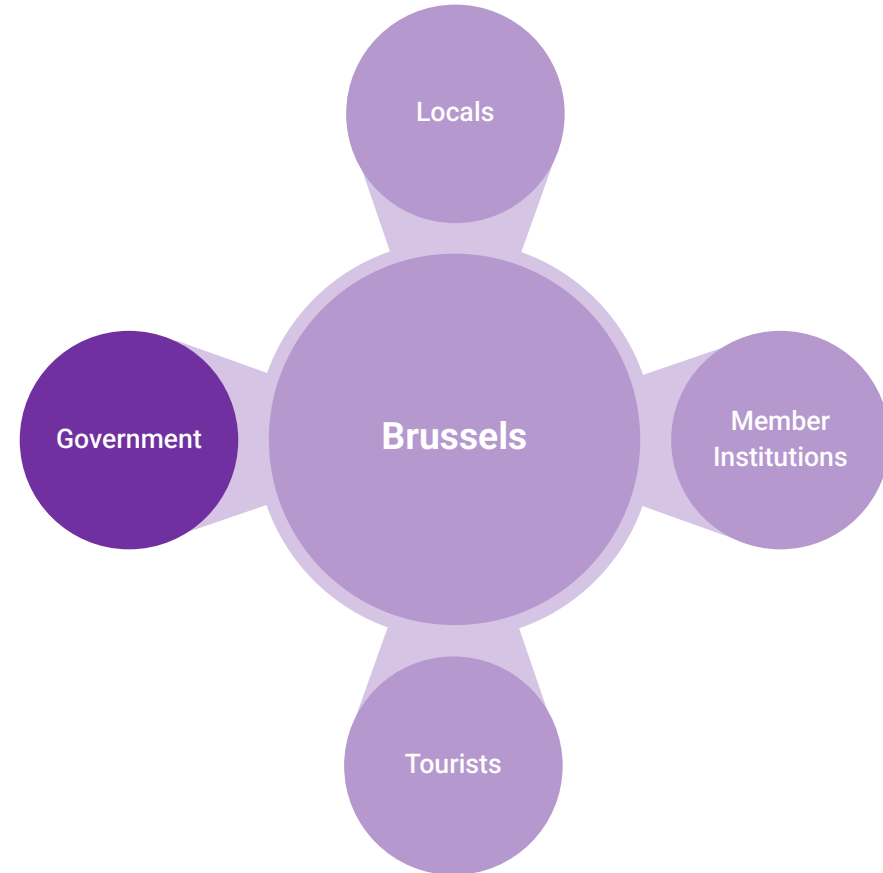
## Benefits: Tourists

- **Deeper Cultural Engagement:** Invites tourists to expand their experience of Brussels to include key cultural and artistic destinations.
- **Improved Wayfinding & Comfort:** Redesigns public space to be more intuitive, pleasant, and pedestrian-friendly for visitors.
- **Destination Stickiness:** Encourages longer visits and return trips through dynamic, multilayered cultural offerings.
- **Showcase of Cultural Past & Present:** Provides a gateway into both classic and contemporary facets of culture in Belgium.



## Benefits: Government

- **Cultural Showcase & Soft Power Boost:** Reinforces Brussels' dual role as Belgium's capital and Europe's symbolic cultural heart.
- **Cross-Governmental Collaboration:** Encourages collaboration between municipal, regional, federal, and EU bodies on shared civic priorities.
- **Wellbeing & Social Policy Impact:** Supports goals around public health, inclusion, and access through culturally enriched public space.





## Key Takeaways

**The future Mont des Arts is local, human-scaled, and cohesive.**

Monumental, but inert and fragmented, the Mont des Arts must retain its authenticity while transforming to a human-scale local destination integrated into Brussels' cultural ecosystem.

**The transformation of the Mont des Arts has already begun.**

Recent changes across the Mont des Arts and its member institutions align with and enhance cultural innovation and revitalization projects across Brussels.

**Culture-driven urban revitalization will have comprehensive impact.**

A revitalized Mont des Arts benefits every stakeholder group involved as well as Brussels as a whole.

# Opportunity Areas

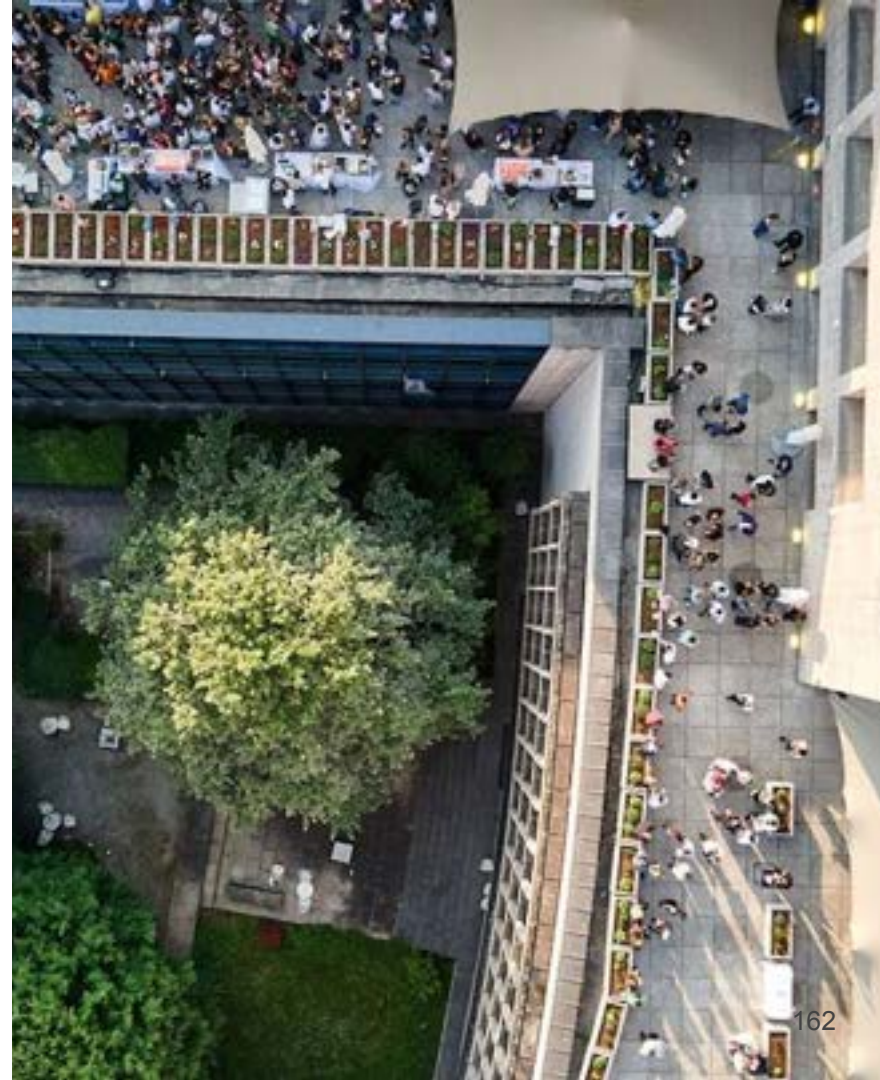


## Overview

The revitalization of the Mont des Arts is ambitious in its scope and intended impact. Identifying opportunity areas ensures the project delivers on its ambitions by highlighting where focused action will yield the most impact over the mid-term.

### Opportunity Areas

- Projecting the Best of Brussels
- Embracing a Local-First Approach to Growth
- Connecting the Past to the Present
- Designing for People
- Activating Interstitials
- Cultivating Cultural Wellbeing



## Projecting the Best of Brussels

Celebrate heritage while reflecting a modern, creative, multicultural Brussels to the world.

**What story should the Mont des Arts tell the world about Brussels?**

## Embracing a Local-First Approach to Growth

Cater to locals first to foster community and create a natural draw for tourists.

**How can the Mont des Arts  
better serve the local  
community?**



## Connecting the Past to the Present

Foster living culture to boost relevance and deepen integration into Brussels' cultural ecosystem.

**What new partnerships,  
commissions, and curation  
could nurture contemporary  
and local relevance?**

## Designing for People

Prioritize human-centered spatial design to welcome more diverse audiences.

**What interventions can make  
the Mont des Arts more  
walkable, welcoming, and  
human-scaled?**

## Activating Interstitials

Creatively activate underutilized spaces to broaden audiences and energize the Mont des Arts.

**Which spaces across the Mont des Arts lend themselves to creative activation?**

## Cultivating Cultural Wellbeing

Blend culture with relaxation, gathering, and recreation to support mental and physical wellness.

**How can the Mont des Arts  
weave moments of relaxation,  
reflection, movement, and play  
into its cultural fabric?**

## Summary

### Projecting Best of Brussels

Celebrate heritage while reflecting a modern, creative, multicultural Brussels to the world.

### Designing for People

Prioritize human-centered spatial design to welcome more diverse audiences.

### Embracing Locals-First

Cater to locals first to foster community and create a natural draw for tourists.

### Activating Interstitials

Creatively activate underutilized spaces to broaden audiences and energize the Mont des Arts.

### Connecting Past to Present

Foster living culture to boost relevance and deepen integration into Brussels' cultural ecosystem.

### Cultivating Cultural Wellbeing

Blend culture with relaxation, gathering, and recreation to support mental and physical wellness.



# Work Sessions: Discussion Summary

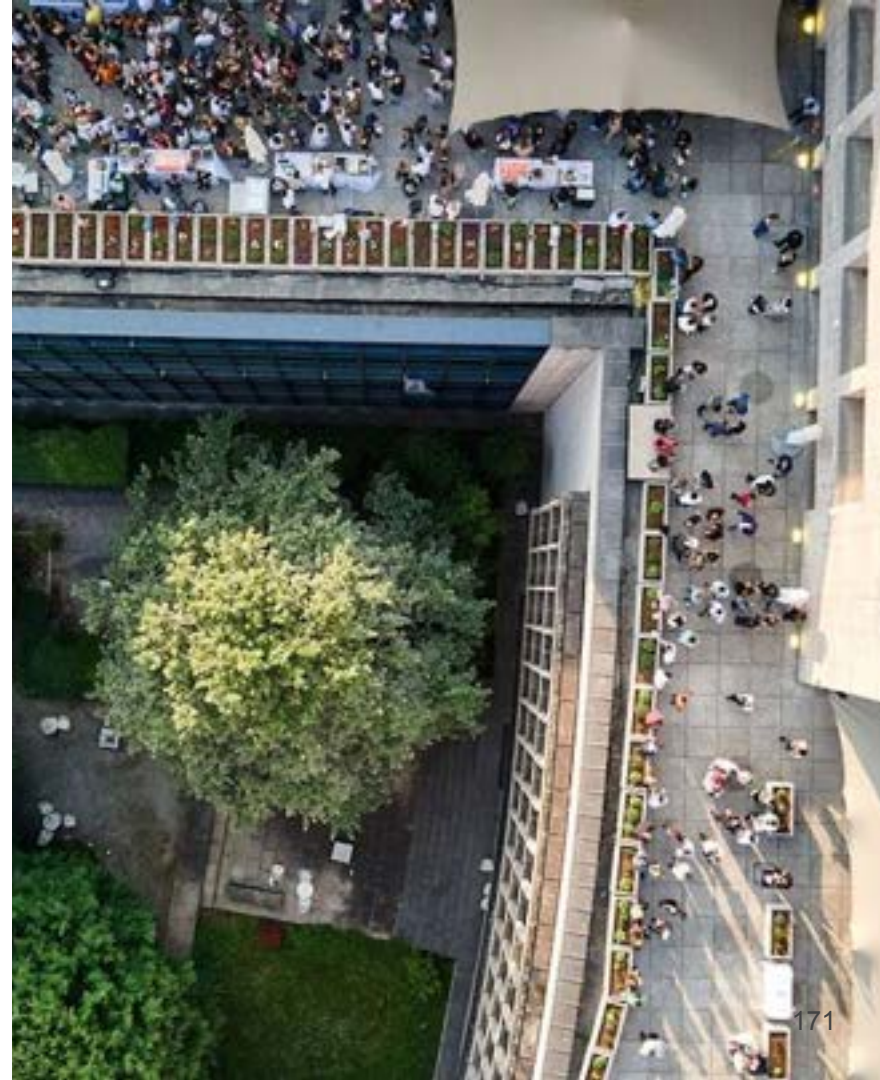


## Overview

Meetings and work sessions onsite in Brussels provided the opportunity to begin building alignment around an exciting future for the Mont des Arts.

### Key Takeaways

- The Mont des Arts must find its “Why?”.
- The cost of inaction is high.
- The Mont des Arts is rich in spatial potential.
- Improving navigation is essential.
- “Drop-shoulder” experiences are key.
- Collaborations have a multiplier effect.
- Now is time for revitalization.



## Key Takeaways

- **The Mont des Arts must find its “Why”:** Developing an authentic vision of success for the Mont des Arts that is rooted in civic purpose will allow key stakeholders to develop an actionable path forward. A strong “Why” will also boost the impact of the exciting examples of museological and urbanistic trends emerging across the Mont des Arts.
- **The cost of inaction is high:** By leaving the Mont des Arts in its current state, Brussels cheapens its global brand. European cultural capitals have already outpaced the city through exciting new and forthcoming public projects. Without decisive action, Brussels may fall irreparably behind.
- **The Mont des Arts is rich in spatial potential:** One of the Mont des Arts’ key assets towards revitalization is the vast amount of interior and exterior space at its disposal. While much of this space is currently underutilized, it provides the opportunity for exciting future activation.
- **Improving navigation is essential:** Approaching from vibrant adjacent neighborhoods, the Mont des Arts is impenetrable. Once on the Mont des Arts, a steep gradient hinders easy mobility. Enhancing its permeability and accessibility will encourage locals’ daily use and drive revitalization.

## Key Takeaways, cont.

- **“Drop-shoulder” experiences are key:** With striking sightlines in the middle of a bustling city, the Mont des Arts has the potential to become a restorative oasis by introducing inviting, human-scaled public spaces where locals and visitors can slow down, relax, and recharge.
- **Looking backwards isn’t enough:** To cultivate relevance and vibrancy, the Mont des Arts must not only preserve and activate cultural heritage—it must also look ahead and embrace Brussels’ evolution from a monoculture into a rich but fragmented cultural ecosystem.
- **Collaborations have a multiplier effect:** When institutions work together, the resulting impact for audiences is greater than the sum of the parts. Integrated partnerships can support cohesion and collective identity.
- **Now is time for revitalization:** A revitalization of the Mont des Arts has long been discussed. The combination of existing momentum, aligned key stakeholders, and a growing gap between Brussels and European cultural capitals means now is the time to act.



# Next Steps





## Overview

In the coming days and weeks:

1. Work Teams will review this document and continue internal conversations within their organizations to address and respond to the questions, key issues and relevant examples it surfaces.
2. Philippe le Hodey and Joachim Spyns will collect the responses from each organization and share with the entire group.
3. At your discretion, AMCA can be engaged for a Phase 2 assignment working with the group to develop specific, formal recommendations for the revitalization of the Mont des Arts.



Arthur M. Cohen *Advisors* LTD

# Appendix: State Archives





## Overall Impression

The State Archives house a vast and invaluable collection serving individual researchers and institutions. While some participatory research initiatives exist, the archives remain largely invisible to the public and underutilized culturally.

**Future Vision:** To fully revitalize the Mont des Arts as a vibrant cultural district, consider relocating the State Archives and transforming its current home into a dynamic space that enriches the public's cultural life.



## Possible Uses

**Visitor Center:** Given its central location, the State Archives building could serve as a welcome center to provide orientation and amenities to visitors to the Mont des Arts.

**Open Storage Space:** Purpose-built for archival care, the State Archives building is already designed for preservation and could be transformed into a “behind-the-scenes” storage experience by a member institution.

**Temporary Exhibition Space:** Adjacent to many member institutions, the State Archives building could house exciting cross-programming.





# Appendix: Project Acknowledgements



## Workshop Participants and Team

### Morning Workshop Participants

Anouk Andries, Customer Manager, Belgian Buildings Agency  
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Géraldine David, General Director, Royal Museum of Art and History  
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Donatiëne de Sejournet, Board Member, Vzw Quartier des Arts  
Wannes Devos, Senior Project Coordinator, King Baudouin Foundation  
Frédérique Honoré, Director, Coudenberg Palace  
Jean-Claude Marian, Board Member, Vzw Quartier des Arts  
Carolein Mertens, Head of Public Engagement, Royal Library of Belgium  
Marie-Laure Roggemans, President, Vzw Mont des Arts  
Christophe Slagmuylder, Head of Music, BOZAR  
Arnaud Vajda, Chairman of the Board, The Belgian Science Policy Office  
Isabelle Vanhoonacker, Director of Public Services, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium  
Annelien Verbeeck, Director of PR and Education, Royal Museum of Art and History  
Bernard Viérin, Vzw Quartier des Arts  
Thierry Wauters, Director, Urban Brussels

### Afternoon Workshop Participants

Mélanie Guerreiro, Advisor to the Federal Minister for Science Policy  
Anaïs Maes, Alderwoman for Urban Development of the City of Brussels  
Ans Persoons, State Secretary for Urbanism and Heritage for Brussels Capital Region

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Philippe Le Hodey, Board Member, Vzw Quartier des Arts  
Kim Oosterlinck, Director, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium  
Joachim Spyns, Advisor, Royal Library of Belgium

### Arthur M. Cohen Advisors

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Peter Kalal, Senior Strategist  
Elizabeth Misitano, Data Analyst and Project Manager

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